



'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'

The Dramatic Works of
Ralph Vaughan Williams

by Frank Howes

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THE DRAMATIC WORKS
OF
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

BY
FRANK HOWES

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NOTE

THIS book, containing analytical notes on four of Dr. Vaughan Williams's works for the stage, is a companion volume to *The Later Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* and covers a similar period in his productive career. Mr. A. E. F. Dickinson has dealt with *Hugh the Drover* and *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* in his *Introduction to the Music of R. Vaughan Williams* in this series. Apart from these the only major stage work here necessarily omitted is *A Christmas Carol*, composed in 1921, which is a few years earlier than *Flos Campi*, the starting-point in my 'Pilgrim' on the later symphonic and choral works. Otherwise the two books are concurrent, for the final touches were not put to *The Poisoned Kiss* until 1934, which was about the time when *Five Tudor Portraits* was conceived. I regret that I have not been able to quote all the folk-tunes in *Sir John in Love*, but I found the study of this opera so absorbing that I was appalled when I realized how expansive I had been in comment and how prodigal in musical illustrations. To preserve some semblance of proportion I took a blue pencil and used it first on the quotations of folk-tunes on the grounds that they are accessible in the vocal score of the opera, and the determined reader can find them elsewhere from the references I have given him. Even so, after this slimming process Falstaff takes up more than his fair share of room.

I am indebted to Miss Anne Gilchrist, F.S.A., for valuable help in tracking down many of the folk-songs quoted in *Sir John in Love*.
F. H.

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Sir John in Love

Opera in Four Acts

PREVIOUS to *Sir John in Love* Vaughan Williams had written one opera, *Hugh the Drover*, and subsequently he has written two more, *Riders to the Sea* (composed in 1927) and *The Poisoned Kiss*, produced at Cambridge in 1936. *Hugh the Drover* was begun in 1911 but was not finished till after the War; it was produced at the Royal College of Music in 1924 and subsequently taken on tour by the British National Opera Company. *Sir John in Love* has several affinities with *Hugh the Drover* and must have been begun soon after the latter had won its public success. It was produced, like its predecessor, in the little theatre at the Royal College of Music; four performances conducted by Dr. Malcolm Sargent were given in the week 21-6 March 1929. It was revived for the Oxford Musical Festival of 1930 with some of the same cast of R.C.M. students, the rest being local Oxonians. It is dedicated to S. P. Waddington, Dr. Vaughan Williams's distinguished colleague on the staff of the R.C.M., in a playful epistle which pays tribute to Mr. Waddington's great knowledge, which might so well be devoted to the composition of an opera but is instead given to 'teaching elementary harmony to unwilling flappers'. Dr. Vaughan Williams suggests that the roles should be reversed, but then runs away from his own suggestion. There is besides this letter prefixed to the score a Preface of such importance that it must be quoted in full:

'To write yet another opera about Falstaff at this time of day may seem the height of impertinence, for one appears to be entering

into competition with three great men—Shakespeare, Verdi, and Holst.

'With regard to Shakespeare, my only excuse can be that he is fair game, like the Bible, and may be made use of nowadays even for advertisements of soap and razors.

'I hope that it may be possible to consider that even Verdi's masterpiece does not exhaust all the possibilities of Shakespeare's genius.

'And I hope I have treated Holst with the sincerest flattery not only in imitating his choice of Falstaff as the subject of an opera but in imitating his use of English folk-tunes in the texture of the music. The best I can hope will be that *Sir John in Love* may be considered as a sequel to his brilliant *Boar's Head*. (I have made no mention of Nicolai's *Merry Wives* because, apart from the delightful overture, his music is not known in England.)

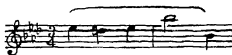
'My chief object in *Sir John in Love* has been to fit this wonderful comedy with, I trust, not unpleasant music. In the matter of the use of folk-tunes, they only appear occasionally and their *titles* have no dramatic relevancy (except possibly in the case of "John, come kiss me now"). When a particular folk-tune appeared to me to be the fitting accompaniment to the situation, I have used it. When I could not find a suitable folk-tune, I have made shift to make up something of my own. I therefore offer no apology for the occasional use of a folk-song to enhance a dramatic point. If the result is successful I feel justified; if not, no amount of "originality" will save the situation. However, the point is a small one, since out of a total of 120 minutes' music the folk-tunes occupy less than 15.

'The text is taken almost entirely from the *Merry Wives*, with the addition of lyrics from Elizabethan poets. A few unimportant remarks (e.g., "Here comes Master Ford") are my own.'

Two general considerations, not identical but related, are raised in this preface: one is nationalism—how far is an Englishman likely to be more successful in finding a true musical match for an English comedy than an Italian?—the other is the use of folk-song.

Verdi's *Falstaff* is a masterpiece, mellow with a humanity equal to Shakespeare's own. In a sense masterpieces cannot be compared, yet if two composers

write an opera apiece on the same subject comparisons are inevitable. Nor need they be odious. I am the last person to have resort to the unavailing and somewhat disreputable method of criticism which consists in praising A by a depreciation of B. I shall go beyond Dr. Vaughan Williams's own statement that perhaps Verdi's masterpiece does not exhaust all the possibilities of Shakespeare's genius only to the extent of saying that perhaps an English composer, especially a composer steeped in the music and, through the music the spirit of Shakespeare's own day may give us a more authentic English bourgeoisie, a more romantic Windsor forest, and a greater homogeneity of subject and treatment. With the utmost reserve I should urge that perhaps Nanetta is not quite Sweet Anne Page, who would hardly speak in these accents even to the Fenton whom she preferred above all her other suitors,



Lips are love's bow-strings
Il la - bro é l'ar - co

nor is Anne quite the girl to take the top line in the splendid ensemble at the end of Verdi's second act. More precocious Italian maidens can carry off this sort of thing better than a young English girl. (Yet I would abate not a word of the praise that has been heaped on Verdi's love-music: 'perhaps', as Mr. Toye says, 'the only operatic music in which the love of boy and girl is adequately interpreted in accordance not only with Latin but with Anglo-Saxon ideals'.)

Then Sir John himself. It is a commonplace of Shakespearian criticism that the Falstaff of the *Merry*

Wives is not the Knight of the Histories. He is a lesser man, little more than a figure of fun with only the indomitable humour of the greater Falstaff left to retain for himself our sufficient sympathies. Boito improved Falstaff for Verdi with such devices as the famous monologue on honour borrowed from *Henry IV*. Mr. Toye admits that in the process he may have become somewhat latinized, though I am not aware of any discrepancy between Verdi and Shakespeare while I am listening to *Falstaff*. Nevertheless, the tune of 'John, come kiss me now', as treated by Vaughan Williams, hits off the exact measure of swagger of Falstaff about to embark on his newest conquests in such a way as Verdi's brief march-tune has hardly time to do. In fact the chief difference between the two operas is probably one of tempo (in the broad sense). Verdi was criticized at the time of *Falstaff's* first production for the sheer speed and brilliance of the work—even Stanford, who admired it greatly, thought it a little lacking in contrast and repose. The gait of Vaughan Williams's Sir John is a little heavier, and the pace of the intrigue more in keeping with our soft grey climate than with the behaviour of Latin people under the blue Mediterranean sky.

The patch of Italianism in *Falstaff* which strikes the ear most sharply is at the reading of the letter when Mistress Ford and Mistress Page compare notes. But this is a piece of deliberate mock-heroic on Verdi's part, an amusing parody of his own heroic style. It does, however, for the moment take us away from Windsor. Still more does his ending of the opera. Verdi cuts short the midnight revels in the forest with a fugue in which the actors, as Mr. Bonavia says, 'throw down the mask and come to us no longer as

comedians but to sing and make merry with us'. 'The whole conception', says Mr. Toye, 'is one of deliberate artificiality related more nearly, despite its setting, to the *Commedia del' Arte* than to any dramatic product of Romanticism.' True enough, and Shakespeare himself is not above coming forward frankly on occasion in an epilogue or making his actors say direct to the audience 'Our play is done'. He does not do so in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but ends the play with Ford alias Brook saying to Sir John,

To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word;
For he to-night shall lie with Mistress Ford.

These lines are set by Vaughan Williams, but they are not the end of the opera. Falstaff responds to the quip with a good-natured acquiescence in the spirit of practical joking, and in the vein of one of Shakespeare's philosophical jesters comes forward and addresses the company and the audience in a song:

Whether men do laugh or weep,
Whether they do wake or sleep,
Whether they die young or old,
Whether they feel heat or cold,
There is underneath the sun
Nothing in true earnest done.

which is taken up by the whole company though not in a formal fugue, for the illusion of the play is not yet abandoned. And though the curtain comes down on the rich, genial yet slightly ceremonious theme of this song,

Ex. 1.

Moderato maestoso.



Strings & wd.-wind.

the last thing that happens is a general Country dance to Playford's tune 'Half Hannikin'. We take no formal farewell of the players, but see them dancing their way back from the forest to the town as the dawn breaks on Windsor and the lights go up in the theatre, with an old English tune running in their heads as well as ours.

Let me repeat that I am not disparaging Verdi in this comparison, nor would I claim that Shakespeare's Falstaff is a national figure who cannot go abroad. All I am saying is (with Vaughan Williams) that Verdi does not exhaust Shakespeare and that, whatever else he may or may not give us, Vaughan Williams's English music is of a piece with Shakespeare's comedy and the English life it depicts. Here is what Masfield says of *The Merry Wives*:¹

'It is the only Shakespearean play which treats exclusively of English country society. As a picture of that society it is true and telling. Country society alters very little. It is the enduring stem on which the cities graft fashions.'

Vaughan Williams, nourished on the songs and dance tunes of English country life, can 'fit this wonderful comedy' with music that is not only 'not unpleasant' but belongs to it because it has grown out of the same 'enduring stem'.

And this is the defence if any be needed for the presence of folk-song in an original work. None surely is needed in the face of the successful use of folk-song for dramatic purposes by the Russians and most conspicuously by Smetana in *The Bartered Bride*. Furthermore, Dr. Vaughan Williams has himself a good deal to say about originality and its relation to common property in his book on *National Music* (see in particular chapter v) which I need not repeat. By a signifi-

¹ Home University Library, *Shakespeare*, p. 125.

cant coincidence he uses in his definition of folk-song the identical metaphor employed by Masfield in the passage quoted above. Masfield speaks of the 'enduring stem' of English life; Vaughan Williams defines folk-song as an 'individual flowering on a common stem'. An English folk-song is therefore a flower on the common stem of all things English. Folk-song grows in small communities, flourishes among 'country society', and indeed owes its survival in England to the peasantry. The use of folk-song to give point to a play about country folk is obviously appropriate. That Page and Ford and Quickly were not peasants does not spoil the correspondence, for though in 1900 folk-song was only found alive among peasants, in 1600 things were quite otherwise. The same dances were danced on the village green and in the Queen's palace. The same tunes were whistled in the street and played in the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy. Burghers and merchants sang madrigals made for them out of tradesmen's street-calls by composers in the employment of the nobility. Society before the Industrial Revolution was much more homogeneous than it is now, though jazz and wireless and sound-films are in recent years doing something towards levelling out class differences of taste. The evidence for the general diffusion of song and dance tunes, which were thus 'popular' in a fuller sense than any music of the million in vogue to-day, is to be found in letters, in manuscripts, and in publications of the time. Thus, the Earl of Worcester in a letter to the Earl of Shrewsbury dated 19 September 1602 remarks, 'We are frolic here at Court; much dancing in the Privy Chamber of Country Dances before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith,' while the tune of *Sellinger's Round*, which

may very well have been one of the dances, was, like the *Carman's Whistle*, made by Byrd into a set of variations for virginals. This close contact between the composer and the everyday life of his time, in contrast to the cosmopolitan and courtly traditions of the eighteenth century, has always been Vaughan Williams's own ideal, not because he does not care for eighteenth-century music but because in his own career it became gradually clear to him that English musical life had been too long in tutelage to Germans and Italians and that if it was to revive it must be emancipated. A national music was a necessity to the British composer, and the path of freedom was discovered about fifty years ago in our native folk-song. Having caught its note, as he himself relates, he saw that it led to a closer contact between art and real life and provided the composer with a touchstone of artistic sincerity. The 'London' Symphony, which is not a folk-song symphony, was the outcome of this folk-song method of approaching contemporary life. In *Sir John in Love* the method is reversed in order to serve historical truth. The modern music pours forth and enfolds Shakespeare's comedy, but it leads up to, not away from, folk-song. In Shakespeare's day music and life were at one; popular music reflected popular life; for every situation there was a song; and so the composer can cap his own music with a tune that belongs to the people of the play, to the period of the play, and to the topicality of the play.

The topicality of the play is also enhanced by his inclusion of Elizabethan lyrics and songs from other plays of Shakespeare in his libretto. The spirit must be concentrated, and just as the folk-song caps the situation so the lyric clinches the emotional tension.

Farce and music do not march very long or very easily in double harness. Boito when he made his libretto for Verdi left out the broadest and most dramatically improbable episode in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—Mother Prat, the fat woman of Brainford. So does Vaughan Williams, and as if still further to sweeten his opera he lengthens its lyrical moments, thus providing contrast to the general bustle of the comedy which Stanford found lacking in Verdi. Herein perhaps Vaughan Williams profited by the experience of his predecessor. These interpolations will be dealt with as they occur, and the music will now be discussed act by act.

Act I

The first act, unlike the other three, is not formally divided by the fall of the curtain into scenes. Its music is continuous but its eight episodes are each dominated by an appropriate musical characterization. There is a certain broad use of *Leitmotive* so that cross references can occasionally be made with dramatic effect, but it is no Wagnerian system of predetermined identity disks. These salient rhythms, phrases or folkish tunes indeed ought not to be called *Leitmotive* at all: they are merely prominent motifs which seem to epitomize musically the dramatic significance of each episode.

Thus the seventeen bars of Prelude before the curtain rises are a bustling 6/8 rhythm breaking without notice given into 3/4 and back again. This restless 6/8 serves to introduce Shallow, the country magistrate, and Evans, the Welsh parson, in a state of turmoil about Falstaff's misdeeds, while Slender in a corner essays a sonnet to Anne Page, thus presenting the two main themes of the play, ancient villainy and young love.

When Falstaff, entering with Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol, begins to speak, the brisk 6/8 rhythm gives place to a slower and tranquil 3/4 in the folk-song 'A sailor loved a farmer's daughter'. 6/8, however, is resumed for the colloquy of rascallions, a sextet of abuse, 'You Banbury cheese', 'How now, Mephistophilus', and so on. Pistol, challenged by Falstaff with an accusation of having robbed Slender, answers *alla marcia* in common time, but again the sextet is resumed and completed in 6/8. The 6/8 rhythm is the dominant motif of Episode 1.

The folk-song quoted by the orchestra while Falstaff and Shallow are wrangling seems, in spite of what the composer says in his Preface, to have been first suggested by the words 'But not kissed your keeper's daughter', as though the lilt of the words called up a snatch of tune in Falstaff's mind. Otherwise, as he says, the words have no dramatic relevancy. The tune as quoted in the score is a variant of the last part of the tune in Stanford's *Songs of Old Ireland*. Stanford took it from Petrie's collection and it has an Irish flavour, though parallel English versions—to the words of 'The Young Servant Man' or 'The Cruel Father'—are to be found.

Episode 2 serves to introduce Anne Page and contains much lyrical music, beginning with the folk-song 'A Sailor from Sea', including a sad reflection from Anne in the style not of a folk-song but of an ayre to the lute, and finishing with a love duet in which occurs the first hint of the big wedding-song in the last act, of which the clue is



Anne enters carrying wine, followed by Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford. Slender, who has been driven back by the exit of the ruffians, stumbles against Anne. But before he can apologize to Anne or speak to the two wives the orchestra has begun to surround the person of Anne with the lovely tune harmonized as only Vaughan Williams can harmonize a folk-tune, so that the harmony tears the heart out of it yet in adding something to it leaves it more itself than ever: 'The Sailor from Sea' is one of Sharp's tunes from Somerset (see *Folk Songs for Schools*, Novello's Book, 268), and there is no relevance in its words to the present situation beyond the happy love, which Anne is not to find yet but will ultimately. This is the *Leitmotif* of Anne's 'pretty virginity' and is heard again a few pages later when Anne reappears to bid Shallow and Evans come in to dinner. These two gentlemen meantime continue to discuss Falstaff's 'disparagements' against an accompaniment of the kind of folk-dance tune which Vaughan Williams uses throughout this opera for any sort of fussing, coming and going, or intrigue:



The gavotte with which Anne tries to get Slender into the house is an extension of the same principle though it is far from bustling and is marked 'quasi lento':



Slender takes a good deal of coaxing with his reiterated 'After you', but when he finally disappears Anne stays outside and laments her unhappy love. A plaintive oboe expresses for her the melancholy reflection that a 'world of vile ill-favoured faults (meaning Dr. Caius) looks handsome on three hundred pound a year'.



And then she sings:

Weep eyes, break heart,
 My love and I must part;
 Cruel fates true love do soonest sever.
 O I shall see thee never, never.
 O happy is the maid whose life takes end
 Ere it knows parent's frown or loss of friend.

which comes from a play of Thomas Middleton (c. 1570–1627), *The Chaste Maid of Cheapside*.

But she has hardly finished when she hears Falstaff's voice off stage. Fenton is singing 'Do but look on her eyes', the second stanza of Jonson's 'The Triumph' which is to be her wedding-song in the last act.¹ Anne joins him and they sing a duet, he going on to 'Have you seen but a whyte lily grow' and she to 'Come, O come my life's delight, Let me not in languor pine', borrowed from Campian, Ex. 2 providing the shape both of Fenton's song and of the accompaniment. After this lyrical moment the lovers discuss their unhappy predicament to Ex. 5 and finally part as Page appears to warn off the young man once more.

¹ 'Do but look' and 'Have you seen' are sung or said by Wittipol in Jonson's play *The Devil is an Ass* (1610).

After this lyrical episode knockabout begins again: Dr. Caius, Mrs. Quickly, and Rugby march in to a quasi-folk-tune:

Ex. 6.

Allegretto scherzando.



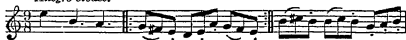
Piccolo & clarinet.

Dr. Caius invokes Mrs. Quickly's aid in his suit of Anne mainly in very lightly accompanied recitative (Ex. 6). Mrs. Quickly to cover up the fact that she is playing the same game of go-between for more than one party starts singing the ballad 'Robin Hood and the Bishop'. Shakespeare merely indicates the refrain 'And down adown a', &c. Vaughan Williams puts into her mouth the last verse of the ballad to a snatch of the tune collected by H. E. D. Hammond in Dorset in 1906 from George Stone, an old post-boy who at the age of 89 was living at Wareham.

A new movement, which begins as a trio but develops into a quartet for Mrs. Quickly, Dr. Caius, Simple, and Rugby, is conducted over another scherzo-like tune of folk-dance derivation:

Ex. 7.

Allegro vivace.



Strings.

This episode is rounded off on a more lyrical note: Dr. Caius forgets his anger and becomes sentimental as he thinks of Anne. He begins to sing to her the old French chanson, 'Vrai dieu d'amours, confortez moy'. This finished, with comments in descant by

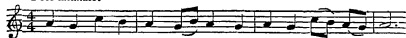
Mrs. Quickly and Rugby, the procession moves off to Ex. 6.

The fourth episode is brief and consists solely of Fenton's interview with Mistress Quickly in furtherance of his suit of Anne. The music sways ruminatively as Mrs. Quickly considers the claims of the three suitors and Ex. 6 is heard faintly rumbling in the bass beneath. At this point occurs the optional Episode subsequently composed and published. See below, p. 42.

The fifth sub-scene is musically 'alla marcia'. Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol enter with the spoils of their thieving expedition and engage with the Host of the Garter in the singing of the ballad from *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, 'Jolly Good Ale and Old' by John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells:

Ex. 8.

Poco animato.



Back and side go bare, go bare, Both foot and hand go cold.

The rhythm is kept up as the song gives place to dialogue and there is a recapitulation of this refrain. All this, however, is but a prelude to the entry of Falstaff himself, who comes on to announce his plot for courting the two Merry Wives.

The dominant theme of the music is the folk-song, 'John, come kiss me now'. Played low down in the gamut (on 'cello and bass), its fat complacency enhances the dramatic point. 'I do mean to make love to Ford's wife,' declares Falstaff, walking up and down preening himself, while the tune implies that he is confident of an invitation from the lady in question. The tune

is found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book as the subject of a piece by William Byrd. It had a great vogue in Shakespeare's day and subsequently, though it appears to have been more used as a dance than as a song. There is a reference to it in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*—

Jack Shine. I come to dance, not to quarrel. Come, what shall it be? *Rogero?*

Jenkin. Rogero! no; we will dance *The Beginning of the World Cicerly*. I love no dance so well as *John, come kisse me now*.

A Woman Killed with Kindness and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are practically contemporary—about 1602. But the tune retained its vogue well on into the seventeenth century and is quoted by Playford in his *Introduction to the Skill of Musick*. There is an allusion to it in the *Westminster Drollery* of 1674:

The fiddler shall attend us
And first play *John, come kisse me*,

and another one is a 1687 translation of *Don Quixote* by J. Phillips. The song was parodied by Jacobite enthusiasts into 'James, come kiss me now' as an apology for having deserted his cause. Chappell, that pioneer in musical antiquarian research, knew all this about it in the middle of the nineteenth century, but the tune did not regain its popularity until the revival of interest in folk-music and Tudor music which began a generation or so ago. The tune is the basis for Falstaff's plot, and after being elaborately worked into a quintet for the five men (Host, Falstaff, and the three rascallions) it is only broken off by Nym and Pistol suddenly finding conscientious scruples to bearing Falstaff's identical letters to the two ladies. Falstaff assumes an air of overwhelming dignity (reiterated triplets) as he sends the letters by the page Robin,

and walks majestically into the inn to the strains of 'John, come kiss me' once more.

There is a brief episode of three pages length in the vocal score dominated by a dry 6/8 rhythm in which Nym and Pistol plot to reveal Falstaff's adulterous project to Ford, its victim.

The final episode is ushered in by Ford's 'jealousy' motif:

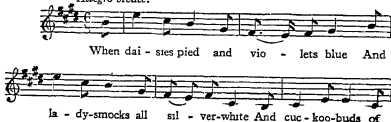
Ex. 9.

Andante con moto.

Pistol and Nym break the news to Ford to the development of Ex. 9, but soon change over to their former 6/8 rhythm into which there slips in the bass the tune of 'When daisies pied', the allusion being to the cuckoo, the bird of fear to the cuckold, whose nest has been invaded by the alien bird.

Vaughan Williams's tune to this song, which is interpolated from *Love's Labour's Lost* in order still further to pique the jealous Ford, begins thus:

Ex. 10.

Allegro vivace.



contain so iniquitous a proposal is couched in triplets which contrast with the square pattern of Ex. 12. This compound duple time is also mentioned in the prelude. Mrs. Ford next enters and the two women compare notes in a duet built out of

Ex. 13.

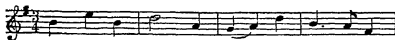
Moderato.

Fl. & oboe.

(You are mer - ry, so am I)

which has also been heard in the brief prelude. They hatch their plot to ensnare Falstaff to music of increasing animation. They quote his 'Thine own true knight' and egg each other on till Mrs. Quickly's voice is heard off stage singing as she approaches a verse of the folk-song 'Lovely Joan'. This is an obscene ballad such as Mrs. Quickly might very well have on her lips, and whose words are appropriate to the present situation. The tune is one collected by Dr. Vaughan Williams himself in Norfolk in 1908 (see *Folk Song Journal*, vol. iv, p. 90). There are other versions in Sharp's *Folk Songs from Somerset*, vol. iv, No. 95, and in *Folk Song Journal*, vol. iv, p. 330. Mrs. Quickly also aptly borrows a song from another play of Shakespeare and sings a new setting of 'Sigh no more, ladies' against a waltz-like accompaniment. It begins as a solo—

Ex. 14.



Sigh no more, la - dies, La - dies sigh no more,



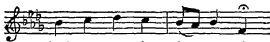
Men were de - ceiv - ers ev - er.

but it soon becomes a trio, which provides a climax and an end to the first scene. An interlude follows,¹ a repetition and expansion, with optional cuts, of the prelude. This entracte gives about four minutes in which the stage can change its scene from a room in Page's home to the parlour of the Garter Inn, in which steps lead off to Falstaff's bedroom. Falstaff is discovered sitting at a writing-table. He calls for Bardolph to fetch him some sack. He sings to himself a song borrowed from a former jollification—his visit to the Gloucestershire magistrates in *Henry IV, Part II*, v. iii, for which Vaughan Williams has provided a melody (unaccompanied) in the folk-ballad, four-in-a-bar style.

Ex. 15.



A cup of wine that's brisk and fine, And



drink un - to the le - man mine.

Another 'original' folk-tune follows immediately through and over which Falstaff and Quickly, who has come on her errand from the two Wives, conduct their negotiations:

Ex. 16.

Moderato.

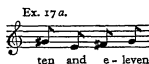


Strings

The continuation of this pseudo-folk-tune becomes

¹ Or the later Interlude, officially so called with a capital I, from the subsequently published *Prelude, Episode, and Interlude*, may be taken here.

sufficiently informal to lend itself to extension and to avoid formal closure, and it is resumed from time to time as Quickly inveigles Falstaff into accepting a rendezvous with Mrs. Ford between

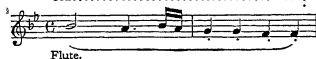


Mrs. Quickly then broaches the subject of Mrs. Page in a different measure:

Ex. 17 b.

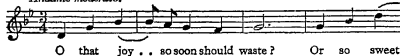
Andante moderato.

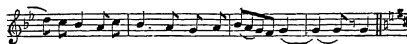
Sua.....



Her business finished, Mrs. Quickly departs and Falstaff sings 'Go thy ways, old Jack', a glorified version of 'John, come kiss me now', turned into triple time and expanded to reflect the soaring magnitude of Falstaff's new hopes. Sir John now in love sets himself to compose a ballad to his mistress's lips. The stage directions read: 'He begins to compose a love-song. Like all amateur composers, he has the best literary traditions coupled with the worst style in music. He sings as he writes in exaggerated "Singer's English" ("thart" for "that", "blees" for "bliss", "raw-hawses" for "roses")'—a piece of satire that is perhaps anachronistic for the Elizabethan period which seems as though it could do no wrong in music, but it adds to the fun:

Ex. 18.

Andante moderato.



. . a bliss as a kiss might not for ev - er last . . so



su - gared, so melt - ing, so soft, so de - li - cious.

and a good deal more in the same vein, the words being borrowed from Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, a play performed by the Children of the Chapel in 1600.

He is interrupted by Bardolph, who ushers in Master Brook alias Ford. Falstaff continues to polish his song and Brook to swear he 'will catch the lecher', in counter-point which sharpens their cross purposes. However, they soon get to business—

Ex. 19.

Moderato.



Strings. *pizz.*

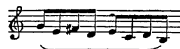
a motif which recurs whenever the two men assume formal relations—when Falstaff accepts Ford's money, for instance. But Brook alias Ford makes his proposal that Falstaff shall seduce his wife in a more insinuating measure:

Ex. 20.

Andante con moto.



*Cello & harp.



Falstaff remembers his appointment for 'ten and eleven' (Ex. 17 *a* inverted) and goes off to dress humming more of his song,

The dew that lies on roses
When the morn herself discloses
Is not so precious, &c.

leaving Ford beside himself with rage (Ex. 20 transmuted).

The final episode of the act concerns the duel that Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh Evans come near to fighting over Anne Page. The tune Ex. 6 is made the basis of an animated discussion for five male voices. And while they are getting more and more excited wondering about the issue of the duel Falstaff emerges dressed in his best and marches off to his assignation to Ex. 12.

Act III

The first of the two scenes of Act III deals with the subsidiary characters—Evans, Shallow, Simple, the Host, Dr. Caius, and Rugby—and carries their subplot a stage farther. Musically it forms a bustling prelude to a still more bustling conclusion, for in the second scene the plot reaches its climax and we have the discomfiture both of Falstaff and of Ford and the triumph of the women. So that this act is to be all animation before the nocturne in Windsor Forest which is to provide the anticlimax necessary to all comedies of intrigue. There is one lyrical moment when Mrs. Ford sings 'Greensleeves', and this lovely setting of the most famous of all Elizabethan tunes makes a point of repose in the swift action and its lively music.

The act, however, actually opens slowly and tearfully with a heavy orchestral sigh:



Poor Sir Hugh Evans is in a great state of perturbation. Sword in hand, awaiting his opponent, he seeks to draw some consolation to calm his nerves from a book of poems. He finds two passages but in his agitation mixes them up—Psalm 137 and Marlowe's 'Passionate Shepherd'. In the play Evans, who has difficulties with his labial consonants, sings the latter first, beginning in the middle of the second stanza of 'Come live with me and be my love'—

To shallow rivers, by whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals,
There will we make our beds of roses
And a thousand vagrant posies,

which is not quite accurate but near enough to what Marlowe wrote about the beds of roses. Emotion overcoming him, he starts again and interpolates a line of the Psalm:

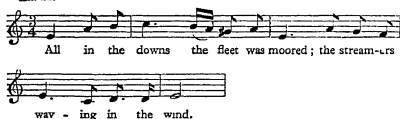
Melodious birds sing madrigals
When as I sat in Papylon
And a thousand vagram posies
To shallow rivers—

In the opera we hear the traditional tune of 'To

Shallow Rivers' before Evans opens his mouth, but the first words he utters are a metrical version of the 137th Psalm which he chants to the psalm-tune 'St. Mary'.

'To Shallow Rivers' is an ancestral version of 'Black-eyed Susan'. Chappell explains that in composing this song for the ballad operas of the mid-eighteenth century Leveridge 'seems to have drawn more on memory than imagination', and adds that 'one of the snatches sung by Ophelia in *Hamlet* and several other old songs begin in the same manner'. 'Black-eyed Susan' begins

Ex. 22.



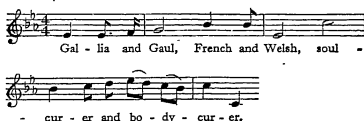
Dr. Vaughan Williams's version is in common time, and after an almost identical beginning the tunes begin to diverge:

Ex. 23.

Lento.

'St Mary' is a tune for the metrical versions of the Psalms which were made in the early days of Protestant worship. Its first known appearance is in Prys's *Welsh Psalter* of 1621. It is to be found in *The English Hymnal* (No. 84), and is the subject of a fine Chorale Prelude for organ by Charles Wood. Evans does not manage to finish his Psalm in one attempt, but breaks off to speak to Simple. And he talks to himself before he begins on 'To Shallow Rivers', at which also he has two attempts. But Simple has returned bringing with him Shallow, Page, Ford, Slender, and Host, but not Caius for the moment. 'Ford takes no part in the proceedings but stands gloomily apart' (stage direction). The orchestra begins to fuss in 12/8 time as each man makes a characteristic utterance. When Caius and Rugby enter it resumes the imitation folk-tune (in the same rhythm) associated with Caius in Act 1, Ex. 6. To this tune Caius springs at Evans, but the two are kept apart by the Host and the others. Host then sings a ballad of pacification 'alla marcia'—

Ex. 24.

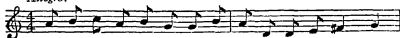


which leads to an outburst of enthusiasm from all the men present except Ford, and they prepare to go in and seal the reconciliation in a drink when a clock strikes ten. This rouses Ford. He invites the company to dinner with a promise that they shall have some sport and he will show them a monster. The company

is agog with curiosity and off they go singing 'Peg a Ramsey'—

Ex. 25.

Allegro.



When I was a bach-e - lor I lived a mer-ry life, But



now I am a mar-ried man And trou-bled with a wife, &c.

which touches Ford too closely for him to be able to join in singing it. This is the tune which Hawkins (in his *History of Music*) says belongs to the song 'Peg a' Ramsey', mentioned by Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*, and it is found in William Ballet's Lute Book (1594) preserved at Dublin. At a later date in *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1707), the tune is found united with its original words:

Bonny Peg o' Ramsey that any man may see,
And bonny was her face with a fair freckled eye;
Neat is her body made and she hath good skill,
And round are her bonny arms that work well at the mill.

But in Shakespeare's time the ballad with the refrain of the watchful wife was common, since Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) quotes the line immediately following those given above, 'Give me my yellow hose again'. Slender sings 'O sweet Anne Page' as a counterpoint to 'Peg a' Ramsey', and at its last lines, 'For my wife she watches me, see yonder where she goes', the stage is blacked out and the orchestra begins an entracte.

The motif of Ford's jealousy, Ex. 9, is heard at once. Then follows optionally, if the scene-shifters need time,

a tissue composed of allusions to music already heard, including Falstaff's song 'O that joy so soon should waste' from Act II, the fussing 12/8 music of Shallow, Slender, Host, and company, and a return to Ex. 9.

Just before the lights go up the orchestra begins a *moto perpetuo* founded on the Country-dance tune 'Speed the Plough'. When the curtain rises we are in Ford's house and we find Mrs. Ford giving orders to bring in the washing basket. When all is made ready for Falstaff's downfall Mrs. Ford lies down on the couch and takes up her lute. She begins to sing 'Greensleeves', which in this setting is the gem of the whole opera. Once again a traditional melody works on a sympathetic composer's imagination so that something is created in which old and new are blended in an exquisite and not easily describable synthesis. 'Greensleeves' seems to have been the most hard-worked tune in England during the century from 1575 on. It is constantly found in the song-books of the early seventeenth century. Verses are printed, and at the head or foot the indication that they are to be sung to the tune 'Greensleeves'—all manner of verse including Christmas carols. It was popular also as a dance measure, but did not appear in Playford's *The Dancing Master* till the edition of 1686. The tune is found in William Ballet's Lute Book, but the first reference to the ballad is in the Stationers' Company's Register in 1580. That it already enjoyed considerable vogue, however, is shown by the fact that there is also a licence of about the same time to another printer for 'A Ballad, being the Ladie Greene Sleeves Answere to Donkyn his frende'. The present words are taken as they stand from the miscellany *A Handefull of Pleasant Delites* of 1584. Shakespeare mentions the

tune twice in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In Act II, Scene I, Mrs. Ford says of Falstaff's knavish disposition and his fair words that 'they do no more adhere and keep place together than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of "Greensleeves"'—which rather looks as though it was then sung at a slow tempo and with the melancholy passion of the present setting than at the brisk pace demanded by dancers, whether of 1680 or of 1930. But 'adhere' and 'keep place' may mean no more than the fitting of notes and accents, and may not refer to the suitability of setting a doxology to a lover's plaint. This allusion is not found in the libretto of the opera. The other one is, however: in Act V, Scene V, Falstaff arrives in Windsor Forest disguised as Herne the Hunter, and on meeting Mrs. Ford there says, 'Let the sky rain potatoes, let it thunder to the tune of "Greensleeves" . . . let there come a tempest of provocation, I will shelter me here'.

As Mrs. Ford finishes her song Falstaff's voice is heard off, echoing hers. He enters, sees Mrs. Ford, who is pretending to have fallen asleep, and sings at once, 'Have I caught my heavenly jewel?' This is the first line of a song of Sir Philip Sidney quoted by Shakespeare, but Vaughan Williams has set the whole verse and made a song of it to balance 'Greensleeves'.

Ex. 26.

Poco più mosso.

Have I caught my heavenly jewel - el teach-ing

asleep most fair to be?

They have hardly had time to join their voices in a duet when the time changes to a brisk 2/4 and Mrs. Quickly comes rushing in, interrupting Falstaff's love passages and announcing the hurried arrival of Mrs. Page. Breathlessly she declares that Ford is at the door:

Ex 27.

Allegro non troppo.



Viola & 'Cello.

Falstaff goes behind the arras. Refuge in the basket is suggested for him and they pack him in to Ex. 27, not, however, before Mrs. Page has confronted him with her letter. Immediately the strains of 'Peg a Ramsey' (Ex. 25) are heard off as Ford's small army approaches. Mrs. Page now retires behind the arras. In Shakespeare the arras is only used for Falstaff's temporary hiding-place before he gets into the basket. In Verdi's *Falstaff* Boito turned it to splendid account in hiding Fenton and Nanetta behind it and revealing them during Ford's frantic search. Vaughan Williams has borrowed the idea, but put Mrs. Page behind the screen to appear demurely at a dramatic moment, and so unexpectedly as to make the Host and Dr. Caius think she is the 'monster' Ford promised to show them.

Ford searches the house to the tune of 'The Old Wife of Dallowgill', while the women and the orchestra have another tune which they maintain in various forms persistently against the dance tune. This is a tune well known in the north Yorkshire dales, where it is used for sword-dancing. Miss Gilchrist recovered part of it from a former leader of a troupe of sword-

dancers at Shap, and Cecil Sharp used it for the Ampleforth Sword Dance. The 'Captain' of the Kirkby Malzeard Sword Dancers refers to it in the last verse of his song introducing the dancers:

You've seen them all go round,
Think on them what you will,
Music, strike up and play
'T'auld wife o' Dallowgill'.

The plot at this point does not follow Shakespeare, who brings back Ford looking foolish at having found no one in his house and begging every one's pardon because he cannot for the moment justify his suspicions. Boito, as I have just mentioned, discomfits Ford by disclosing not Falstaff but the embarrassed young lovers behind the screen. Vaughan Williams reveals Mrs. Page, who comes forward with a mocking curtsy. The company then begin to talk all at once over this mock-formal tune (quasi-minuet):

Ex. 28.

Andante.



The men sing

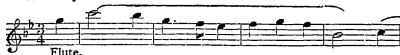
Here lies the proof by that which they do,
Wives may be merry and yet honest too.

This moves Ford to beg his wife's pardon and they all join in singing 'Peg a Ramsey' (Ex. 25).

Act IV

Two scenes of unequal length and importance make up the fourth act. The first scene occupies only half the stage and shows a room in Ford's house where Ford and his wife are conversing in the full ardour of reconciliation. There has been a short prelude of gracious, warm-hearted music, in which occurs this melody:

Ex. 29.

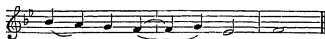
Andante piacevole.

Why does it sound familiar? Partly because it is a blood relation of the other love-songs addressed to Mrs. Ford, though they, to be sure, were lecherous rather than loving in intent; partly because it hints at a quotation from Richard Edwards's madrigal 'In going to my naked bed':

Ex. 30.



The fall - ing out of faith - - ful friends, re -



- new - ing is of love.

Sure enough, when Mrs. Ford grants her husband the pardon which he begs it is in those words from the madrigal—"The falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love". And the whole passage is redolent of

renewed love. But before it is over we hear of a new plot: the Pages arrive with their little son. Sir Hugh Evans is prepared 'to teach the children their behaviours', and Mrs. Page, taking the centre of the stage, unfolds her plan. The old legend of Herne the Hunter is its starting-point and this Tarnhelm-ish progression of chords is its motif:

Ex. 31.

Lento misterioso.

The ghostly goings-on when the Hunter walks the forest, however, are depicted in a bustling 12/8 quasi-folk-dance tune:

Ex. 32.

Poco più mosso.

Evans, having already conducted a rehearsal of his imitation fairies, comes on, and the music changes to another dance tune, which forms the basis of a choral ensemble:

Ex. 33.



Amid all this excitement and bustle the Page parents

are forging another and more serious plot—to get Anne abducted and married that night. But as they favour different suitors and the one thinks she will be wearing green while the other declares for white, it is not surprising that eventually the plot miscarries and Anne gets her own choice. All is now ready and the party makes off to the forest and to the rendezvous at Herne the Hunter's oak. An entracte covers the change of scene which brings the full stage into use. The change can be a quick one, and the music provided for it consists of a page or so of dance music founded on Ex. 33, horn calls to suggest the forest and an orchestral version of 'Greensleeves'.

Scene ii lights up gradually and shows Herne's oak in the moonlight. The conspirators enter in pairs and small parties of would-be fairies also appear. All this plotting has a disturbing effect on the rhythm and phrasing. A clock strikes twelve. They all run off the stage. Enter Falstaff wearing horns, rather depressed but not to be baulked of his aims. Over heavy pizzicato chords his 'Own true knight' theme is heard (Ex. 12). He makes his great invocation to Jove, who became a bull for love of Europa and a swan for Leda, to help one that has become a Windsor stag for Mrs. Ford. Her voice, apt to the moment, is heard off stage calling him in something very like her 'heavenly jewel' tune (Ex. 26). He has just begun to make love to Mrs. Ford when she remarks that Mrs. Page is there too. Ex. 12 again, *agitato* this time, as Falstaff says he is equal to them both. At this point the fairies start chromatic wailings off and soon come on from every direction. Last of all comes Anne Page, dressed as the Queen of the Fairies, who, to the sound of the 'Tarnhelm' theme (Ex. 31), charges them what they shall do. During the

dance that follows Caius and Slender each get the fairy whom they have been given to understand is Anne Page in disguise, while Anne is carried off by Fenton to Ex. 5 (in a broader version). Meantime Evans takes charge of the dance and stops it abruptly exactly opposite Falstaff with the remark that he 'smells a man of middle earth'. The fairies tease Falstaff, pinching him and singeing him with their tapers. The dance starts up again with another 12/8 measure akin to Ex. 32. At a horn call the fairies rush off the stage and leave Falstaff. But only for a moment. A stately processional starts—

Ex. 34.

Moderato.

and the principal characters enter, beginning with Mr. and Mrs. Page; they address suitable remarks to Falstaff, until he says, 'I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass'. Ford then cheerfully says, 'Ah you're not the only one who has the laugh against you. Tell my wife that by now her daughter is married to Master Slender'. But Slender is there to tell how he was deceived into taking a 'lubberly boy' to church. Mrs. Page then says, 'Well, well, never mind, Anne is by this time married to Dr. Caius'. At this moment enter Caius dragging the page Robin whom he has just 'married'. Caius storms to the duel music from the beginning of Act III, plus a counterpoint. Then there is a snatch of Ex. 6 as Caius and Rugby (with

whom it is associated) depart. Ford says, 'This is strange; who hath the right Anne?' And forthwith a soft arpeggio chord of E flat strikes the ear and a chorus is heard off singing—

Ex. 35.

Andante moderato.



See the cha - riot at hand here of



love where-in my la - dy rid - eth.

and the great song prepared for us by Fenton in the first act is launched upon the night air of the forest. From E flat the rapturous tune plunges into the more passionate key of F minor for the second verse, to which Fenton adds a descant which ends up triumphantly in C major. Musically this epithalamium might serve as the climax and conclusion of the opera, but the plot is not yet completely unravelled. Page wants to know what the mischief is the meaning of it all. Falstaff steps forward and utters a few words of appeasement to parental wrath. This touch of magnanimity, to 'John, come kiss me', makes Sir John once more lovable and reconciled to all. In blessing the whole party he again takes the centre of the stage to finish his comedy. But an opera may not descend to its close as a comedy can and ought. It must broaden to some great tune or conclude with some formal ensemble. *Sir John in Love*, like some of the composer's symphonies, ends with an epilogue. We hear its massive opening as the Merry Wives and their husbands finish their last couplet (Ex. 1). Falstaff advances with the

young lovers (Anne and Fenton) on his right and the old rascals (Pistol and Quickly) on his left, and leads the whole company in a sententious finale. The words are taken from Philip Rosseter's *A Book of Airs* (1601) and are sometimes attributed to Campian, who collaborated with Rosseter.

Whether men do laugh or weep,
Whether they do wake or sleep,
Whether they die young or old,
Whether they feel heat or cold,
There is underneath the sun
Nothing in true earnest done.

But with such words formality breaks down and before they have ceased singing they have danced a few steps and regrouped themselves. A bagpiper appears on the scene and begins to play 'Half Hannikin', which is the sign for a general dance, whose figures, taken from English folk-dances, are prescribed by the composer. At the end of it they all take breath and lift up their voices in harmony, echoing the words 'And the world is but a play' and the music of Ex. 1.

The tune 'Half Hannikin' is found in the first edition of Playford's *The Dancing Master* (1650), but the dance was done as early as the reign of Henry VIII. Miss Gilchrist (*Journal of the English Folk Dance Society*, 1931) traces its history from a grotesque dance of early Tudor times. Chappell (*Popular Music of the Olden Time*) quotes an account by Sir H. Herbert of a performance at Whitehall in 1622 of Jonson's masque *Time Vindicated*, after which 'the Prince did lead the measures with the French Ambassador's wife and the measures, branles, corrantos, and galliards being ended, the masquers with the ladies did daunce two country dances, viz. *The Soldier's Marche* and *Huff Hamukin*'.

Vaughan Williams, however, emphasizes its popular origin by harmonizing the tune with consecutive triads to suggest the bagpipe's wheezy sound.

Postscript to Sir John in Love

Six years after the publication of *Sir John in Love*, and a month or so after this study of it had been made, there appeared a supplement to the opera, consisting of a Prologue, an Episode, and an Interlude. These are three optional numbers which may be added to the performance at the discretion of the producer. The conductor is not likely to take a strong line about any of them except the Interlude, which contains new and significant music. It deals with Fenton's wooing of Anne Page and serves to increase the lyrical element in the opera (cf. p. 13).

The Prologue was written for a performance of the opera by the Bristol Opera School in the autumn of 1933, conducted by Mr. Robert Percival. It is based on the tradition that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was hastily composed to order by Shakespeare for a performance before Queen Elizabeth. Plays were the standard method of entertaining royalty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the tradition goes that the Queen wanted to hear more about the Fat Knight, and herself suggested that Sir John might be seen 'in love'. Students of Shakespeare explain the discrepancy between the Knight of the Histories and the Knight of this comedy in the light of this legend. The Prologue, therefore, shows the Queen's Chamberlain, Lord Hunsdon, interviewing the Master of the Revels about the arrangements for the Queen's entertainment. It opens with a fanfare of two trumpets,

two horns, and tenor trombone. Servants are preparing the stage, a procession of girls enters strewing flowers, followed by the Queen herself and the courtiers, the fanfare meantime having changed to a march tune. The words sung are a pastiche with the refrain:

O beauteous Queen of second Troy,
Accept of our unfeigned joy.

(The first line is familiar for its occurrence in Byrd's madrigal, 'This sweet and merry month'.) The players are brought on, Hemynge in the part and costume of Falstaff, to a quasi-folk-dance tune in the style of Sir Roger de Coverley. The Queen expresses her acceptance of the play and her wish to see Falstaff in love. The Lord Chamberlain dismisses the company with the words, 'Now go, make you ready your play "Sir John in Love".' Hence the title, echoed to the roof by the players and chorus.

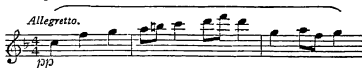
Episode.

The Episode occurs in Act 1 between the exit of Mrs. Quickly, who has been talking to Dr. Caius about Anne Page, and the drinking chorus 'Back and side go bare' sung by Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, and the Host. It is the thieving expedition mentioned in the stage directions (p. 58 of vocal score; cf. p. 18 above), and its purpose is to show these rascallions in operation instead of merely discussing their thefts. Some ladies and gentlemen of the court enter and begin to sing a new version of 'Say, dainty dames, shall we go play?' familiar to us from Weelkes's madrigal. Pistol enters and picks a pocket, Nym does the same, Bardolph tries and fails and only just escapes being seen. Nym criticizes his technique: 'His thefts are too open; he

kept not time'—Falstaff's words in Shakespeare, not Nym's. The dialogue which is put together from the third scene of the first act of *The Merry Wives* is conducted over the madrigal sung by the chorus, while the orchestra continues its very active bass *alla marcia*, which runs naturally into the preliminary music of the carousal ballad, Ex. 8 (see above, p. 18).

The opening music of the Episode, however, has been a flowing texture of free counterpoint based on a tune in the Lydian mode:

Ex. 36.



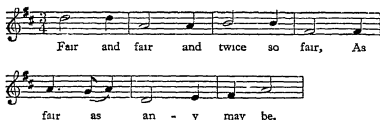
The 'madrigal' hovers tonally between this and D major with an excursion into E, but on its return to the flats it subsides into F. The final tonic chord of F contains D instead of C, but it remains a tonic chord and not a chord of the sixth all the same. After the join with the main stream the tonality becomes D Dorian, so that the two episodes, though related tonally, are differentiated. Thus these few pages form an illuminating example of Vaughan Williams's use of neo-modal keys.

The Interlude.

This interlude, in which Fenton's love for Anne Page is developed and the deception of Slender and Dr. Caius made more prominent, may be played, according to the composer's directions, either between the first and second Acts or between the first and second scenes of Act II. It begins with a short prelude

of the main love music, Ex. 2, a foretaste of Ex. 35. Fenton appears and tells Host of his love for Anne. When the Host replies encouragingly, a pipe tune is heard in the distance, which increases in volume till a chorus of young men and girls, including Anne, comes on singing to the accompaniment of a piper and drummer. Host approaches and asks them what they think of Master Fenton, and promptly answers the question himself over rather breathless repetitions of an eager one-bar phrase. The upshot of it is that Anne says, 'Let him woo for himself', which Fenton thereupon proceeds to do in a lovely song. The words 'Beauty clear and fair' are by John Fletcher. The chorus echoes the lover's word and Anne gives her answer. A choral waltz sets the seal upon their love and a crown of flowers upon their heads:

Ex. 37.



This is developed at length into an ensemble for chorus, lovers, and Host. The words are a dialogue of C  none and Paris in *The Arraignment of Paris*, a play written for the Children of the Chapel in 1583 by George Peele (1558-97). The scene may end here or it may be pursued farther by Anne revealing to Host her difficulty with the two other suitors pressed upon her by her father and mother. The conspiracy which takes place in the fourth act may thus be prepared at this point. When all is arranged Host turns to go,

as he has to wait upon Falstaff, but he turns round and sings to Fenton in joke, 'I mun be married a-Sunday', borrowed from *Ralph Roister Doister*. This is echoed off stage by the chorus and the episode is closing when Caius rushes on calling for Anne Page. Slender also enters and their mutual embarrassment is resolved in an extra-courtly bow to each other. They walk off together just as the piper and drummer are heard returning from escorting the lovers back to Windsor. The orchestral interlude in the score may now be resumed at a point a few bars after it was broken off.

Job

Job is, I believe, one of the greatest creations of its composer: wholly characteristic, profoundly English, and unflinchingly modern. Each of these epithets might be justified and expanded from the score alone. But great as it is, this music is only a part of a greater whole—the ballet, or, as the composer preferred with doubtful historical warrant to call it, a masque for dancing. *Job* is music for the stage, and it is only when it is played as an accompaniment to stage action that the full greatness of the music is revealed. It is perhaps paradoxical that subservience should exalt it, but it is true; and it is also true that without the right music, as this music is right for it, the magnificent drama of the stage could not take wing. The synthesis of dramatic idea, plastic design, stage décor, music, and dancing is achieved in *Job* to a degree that warrants the use of the rare word 'perfect': the unification is complete. To see and hear—why have we no comprehensive word for actively assisting at the presentation of a work of art?—*Job* is a wholly absorbing

experience. And the reason is not far to seek—its origin is a fundamental human experience which in its serial passage through the minds of the poet-author of the Book of Job, of the visionary draughtsman who made the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, and of the mystical¹ composer who has entered into equal partnership with them, has been distilled into one of those sublime works of art in which matter and form have been fused, and from which all dross has been purged.

But it had a physical as well as a spiritual origin. By 1927 Dr. Geoffrey Keynes, a scholar steeped in the mind of William Blake, had become convinced, through long familiarity with Blake's designs, that behind their 'elaborate grandeur' the inner thread of the drama 'possessed a fundamental simplicity, and if this could be successfully extracted it would provide the theme for a ballet of a kind new to the English stage. Blake had, moreover, unconsciously provided in his designs settings which could easily be adapted for stage scenes, and innumerable suggestions in his figures for attitudes and groupings which cried out for their conversion by a choreographer into actuality and movement.'²

Dr. Keynes, therefore, contrived a scenario, and with the help of an artist, Mrs. Gwendolen Raverat, who made the stage settings, reduced Blake's twenty-one engravings to eight scenes and so constructed the framework of a ballet of suitable length. It remained to find the music and the choreography. Diaghileff

¹ I define this dangerous word elsewhere (on p. 31 of *The Later Works of R. Vaughan Williams*), but I mean by it here a mind which has consistently chosen the mystical poets and apocalyptic texts for setting and elsewhere written music strong in sheer contemplation.

² Introduction to Pierpont Morgan Library reproduction of Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job*.

was approached for the latter, but he turned down the project, Dr. Keynes relates, as 'too English' and 'too old-fashioned'. He was right about its Englishness, and it was perhaps just as well that it was left to some one with a better understanding of things English to devise a suitable choreography. Miss Ninette de Valois soaked herself in Blake's designs and, so to speak, dissolved out of their attitudes, groupings, and gestures a flowing stream of physical movement.

Before this Dr. Vaughan Williams had been approached with an invitation to write the music. He found the subject congenial, and when on Diaghileff's refusal there seemed no immediate prospect of the complete work getting on to the stage, he was unable to relinquish the task, and completed his score for a full concert orchestra. In this form *Job* was finished early in 1930 and was performed for the first time at the Norwich festival on 23 October of that year. When the possibilities of dramatic performance came once more into view with the foundation of the Camargo Society for the furtherance of the art of ballet in England, a reduced score was made by Mr. Constant Lambert. The complete work was performed for the first time at the Cambridge Theatre on 5 and 6 July 1931. A few weeks later, on 24 July, it was performed by the same company at the ninth annual festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music held at Oxford.

In writing the music, Dr. Vaughan Williams naturally went for first-hand inspiration to Blake's engravings, and the score bears frequent reference to individual pictures in the series. It is easy to understand that music so derived might not in every particular follow the detailed scenario which Dr. Keynes and Mrs. Raverat had derived from their study of the engravings

The synopsis of the plot and the detailed stage directions of the score are not therefore identical with the synopsis which is always printed in the programme when the ballet is staged. In discussing the music scene by scene I shall therefore print both synopses side by side in order that it may be clear exactly how the composer's mind envisaged the subject presented to him by others.

His change of title from ballet to masque is also significant of his attitude. 'Masque for dancing' is a very fair description, but within the strict meaning of the terms it involves a measure of confusion and even self-contradiction. Dancing is in any case one of the senior partners in the company of the elements which coalesce to form the masque, pageantry is its equal, music and poetry its juniors. But senior or junior, the essence of the masque is that it is a combination of *all* the arts of the theatre, and without songs and dialogues a masque is not a masque but a pantomime. The modern descendant of the masque is the revue. In *Job* there is no spoken word though there is drama, and there are no songs though there is music. In so far as dancing is the chief element of the masque it is redundant to speak of a masque for dancing. In so far as dancing is made to provide the whole instead of only a part of the dramatic structure the masque is not a masque but a ballet. But 'ballet' has two implications in modern times which probably account for Dr. Vaughan Williams shying away from it. It is a sophisticated, if not a frivolous, entertainment and its interest is altogether too female. The modern *balletomane* cares for little beyond the prowess of his favourite ballerina. On the other hand, 'masque' has two implications that make it applicable to Dr. Vaughan Williams's *Job*—aristocratic dignity and the musical

forms of the seventeenth century. The basic designs of the music of *Job* are the dance-forms of the period when the masque flourished in England—the saraband, the minuet, the pavane, the galliard—and in one place the composer suggests that the figures of the dance may take a hint from two English country-dances which were then approaching the height of their vogue. The subjects of the masques were usually taken from classical mythology, allegory, or the more remote branches of history, and their treatment was more opulent and discursive than is desirable in *Job*. The summary of the matter is therefore that ‘masque for dancing’ is apt but inaccurate, and that it is customary and convenient to call *Job* a ballet, because it is one, so long as one remembers it is like no other ballet that has ever been.

The next point to be elucidated throws light on the music indirectly through its bearing on the dramatic plan of the work. Those who see the ballet for the first time must notice and be puzzled by the physical resemblance of Job to the Godhead. On reference to their programme they read that the figure who is clearly represented dramatically as God is called Job’s Spiritual Self, and they leap to the conclusion that this is another of those hypocritical periphrases required by the Censor of Stage Plays, who will not allow representations of Divine Persons on the English stage. But they will be wrong. The idea is Blake’s, and it is Blake who, in his engravings, envisages God as Job’s spiritual self and intentionally makes the two figures resemble each other. Furthermore, Satan is also Job himself in his more earthly and material aspects, and though Satan is not depicted in the lineaments of Job, he is allowed to usurp the Throne. In a simple Biblical drama of Good and Evil Satan might take to

himself all the powers of this world, but could hardly mount the throne of the God of the Universe. The story of Blake's designs is not that of simple illustrations to a book of the Bible but to a drama of his own conception that grew out of a lifelong preoccupation with the Book of Job. Blake's drama is not therefore a debate on the problem of suffering but a 'primarily subjective experience; the account of a man's inward struggle and triumph; the conflict between his indwelling Good and Evil powers'.¹ 'Blake', Mr. Wicksteed further remarks, 'set out to answer the problem of evil which was posed but was ultimately evaded by the author of the Book of Job.' The twenty-one engravings which he made in 1820, thirty-five years after his interest was first engaged in the subject of Job, are therefore Blake's answer to this ultimate problem.

Scene I

(Dr. Keynes's Scenario is printed on the left-hand side of the page, Dr. Vaughan Williams's on the right.)

Job is sitting in the sunset of prosperity with his wife, surrounded by his seven sons and three daughters. They all join in a pastoral dance. When they have dispersed, leaving Job and his wife alone, Satan enters unperceived. He appeals to Heaven, which opens, revealing the Godhead (Job's Spiritual Self) enthroned within. On the steps are the Heavenly Hosts. Job's Spiritual Self consents that his moral nature be tested in the furnace of temptation.

'Hast thou considered my servant Job?' *Introduction, Pastoral Dance, Satan's Appeal to God, Saraband of the Sons of God.* Job and his family sitting in quiet contentment surrounded by flocks and herds. Satan enters unperceived and appeals to heaven. God answers. 'All that he hath is in thy power.'

¹ Dr. Keynes quoting Mr. Joseph Wicksteed, who first convincingly expounded the symbolism in Blake's art.

It is to be observed that, as in *Flos Campi*, each section of the music has a superscription of a quotation from Scripture.

The scene is set as follows:

Ex 1. *Largo sostenuto*



The flute and viola play the pastoral tune, divided strings the consecutive triads which are so conspicuous a mannerism of Vaughan Williams's personal idiom; the harp doubles it all and suffuses it with pale gold. The alternation of triplets with even quavers is a fundamental feature of Job's personal themes, which here include his children. His seven sons and three daughters now dance, and the choreographer is instructed to take a hint from the folk-dances 'Jenny pluck pears' which is in Playford's *The Dancing Master*, and 'Hunsdon House'. The women's dance begins:

Ex 2

Allegro piacevole.



The men respond and encircle the women to

Ex. 3



and by and by the two themes are put together as the dance becomes general. It may be of interest to quote the tune of 'Jenny pluck pears' to show the similarity of rhythmic shape and the combination of simple and compound time—

'JENNY PLUCK PEARS'

Ex. 4.



though the relationship is not in the contour of the tunes but in the figures of the dance.

Job stands up and blesses his children during this dance. The blessedness of Job's estate and the beauty of his family life seem to be symbolized in a descending tune against a rising progression of chords of the sixth and $6/4$:

Ex 5.
 Strings
 & w-wind.

8va.....

ff

This tune is derived from Ex. 1—see the second bar for its germ—and has already been heard with its chordal accompaniment on the entry of Job's family. It is heard again as the curtain goes down when, after his trials are over, he gazes once more on the distant corn-fields and his daughters come in to receive his blessing.

Enter Satan. How is music to depict the Evil One? Evil is moral disorder, a negative quality, that is, not a positive. It is a conception only intelligible by reference to good, which man perceives by a direct intuition. He cannot really conceive pure and positive evil. Now music also is a kind of spiritual order, non-moral in quality but bearing an obvious analogy to a moral order—both for instance lead to a kind of harmony. Music is the organization and ordering of auditory experience; beginning with mathematical pitch and going on to the arrangement of notes in a scale, from there to the evolution of tonality, combined in rhythm with temporal organization and in form with the symmetries of sound, the whole art is an evolution of

successively higher organization and ordering of its subject-matter. (This is why, incidentally, atonality is doomed to failure from the very nature of music itself.) Key and the whole of the elaborate body of experience known as harmony is therefore an analogue of the moral order and is capable of depicting that immorality which is only intelligible in reference to a moral order—mere chaos expresses nothing either in morals or music. Immorality is not chaos, and cacophony, which is sheer musical disorder, will present nothing except chaos. Evil can therefore be very well represented in music by clashes, distractions, and self-contradictions all within the order of harmony. Satan is therefore introduced in a definite key system. The context is G minor; Satan tears it asunder and leaps out of it into A major via a chord of B flat minor.

Ex. 6.

The musical score for Ex. 6 is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a piano introduction in G minor, marked with a 7/4 time signature and a key signature of two flats. The introduction consists of a single melodic line on a grand staff. This is followed by an entry for 'Strings.' and 'Strings & Bassoons.' which features a complex, syncopated rhythmic pattern with frequent leaps and a mix of major and minor tonality. The second system continues this musical texture, showing further development of the syncopated and disintegrating harmonic elements.

The syncopation, the leaps outside the octave and the violent antithesis of major and minor tonality all help the effect of disintegration.

In contrast to this the Heavens now open and reveal the Sons of God grouped round the throne (as in Blake's second engraving). They begin to move in a majestic saraband:

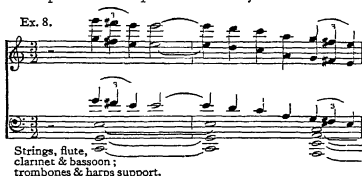
Ex. 7.

Andante con moto.



God summons Satan and says 'Hast thou considered my servant Job?' (Ex. 1). Satan says 'Put forth thy hand now and touch all that he hath and he will curse thee to thy face' (Ex. 6 amplified). God says (Engraving No. 5) 'All that he hath is in thy power' in a phrase of incomparable sweep and authority:

Ex. 8.



The Sons of God resume their saraband; God leaves his throne.

Scene II

Satan after a triumphal dance
usurps the throne.

'So Satan went forth from
the presence of the Lord.'

Satan's Dance.

God's throne is empty. Satan
in wild triumph seats himself
upon it.

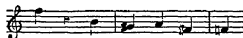
Satan's music with its contradictions of mode, its alternating semitones and its leaps across unrelated key, is recalled (Ex. 6) and developed into an animated and angular dance—

Ex. 9.



Strings *pizz.*

flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone & xylophone.



with a trio in march time and a coda in which the music based on Ex. 6 is heard again as Satan climbs towards the throne. When with a big gesture he seats himself thereon there is a hint of the tune of Ex. 8, but it breaks off at once into Satan's distracted semitones and ends abruptly.

Scene III

Job's sons and daughters are
feasting and dancing when
Satan appears and destroys
them.

'There came a great wind
and smote the four corners of
the house and it fell upon the
young men and they are dead.'

Minuet of the sons and daughters of Job.

Job's children are feasting
and dancing: Satan appears and
destroys them.

The composer directs that the dance shall be formal, statuesque, and slightly voluptuous. This is the minuet he writes for it, mostly in three-bar phrases:

Ex. 10.

Andante con moto.



Satan's stroke is depicted in the juxtaposition of two triads in different rhythmic positions (cf. the end of Ex. 6).

Ex. 11.



This scene is sometimes referred to quite inappropriately as the Bacchanale.

Scene IV

Job's peaceful sleep is disturbed by Satan with terrifying visions of War, Pestilence, and Famine.

'In thoughts from the visions of the night . . . fear came upon me and trembling.'

Job's Dream. Dance of Plague, Pestilence, Famine, and Battle.

Job is quietly asleep. Satan leans over him, and evokes terrible visions which dance round him, foreboding his tribulation to come.

A new Job theme is announced by the viola over a tonic pedal:

Ex. 12.



When Satan enters (without his own theme) the music illustrates numbers 6 and 11 of Blake's engravings. Plague has some curdling consecutive fourths and fifths over one of Vaughan Williams's walking basses in level crotchets. Battle has a martial tune on the trumpets. After the visions have danced round Job they disappear, and the scene leads straight into the next. Hereafter the numbering of the scenes is out of step, as the composer has separated the dance of the Messengers from that of the Hypocrites which follows it.

Scene V

Messengers come to Job with tidings of the destruction of all his possessions and the death of his sons and daughters. Satan introduces Job's Comforters, three wily hypocrites. Their dance at first simulates compassion, but this gradually changes to rebuke and anger. Job rebels 'Let the day perish wherein I was born.' He invokes his vision of the Godhead, but the opening Heaven reveals Satan upon the throne. Job and his friends shrink in terror.

apparent sympathy, but gradually changes to rebuke and anger. Job curses God. 'Let the day perish wherein I was born.' Job invokes his vision of God. Heaven opens and reveals Satan seated on God's throne. Job and his friends cower in terror.

Scenes V and VI

'There came a messenger.'

Dance of the messengers.

The messengers announce to Job the destruction of all his wealth and the death of his sons and daughters. Job still blesses God.

'Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth.'

Dance of Job's Comforters
Job's Curse. A vision of Satan.

Satan introduces Job's comforters, three wily hypocrites. Their dance is at first one of

Job wakes to a little call from the oboe, and soon processional music is heard for the funeral cortège of Job's sons and their wives. The scene ends with Ex. 12 richly harmonized in diatonic triads.

In the Bible Job's friends are not depicted as 'three wily hypocrites'. On the contrary we read (Job ii. 11-13):

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place: Elphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him and to comfort him.

And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads towards heaven

So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

Their sympathy seems genuine enough, and though Job lost his temper with their obstinate insistence that his sufferings must be punishments for his sins, they are ultimately reconciled to him (c. 42). But in Blake's vision they are a 'Satan's Trinity of Accusers' and are represented in Plate 10 with accusing fingers pointing at him. In Vaughan Williams's music their entry is prefaced by a half-bar of Satan's music, and the stage direction says specifically 'Satan introduces in turn Job's three comforters'. Now as Satan is Job's own lower nature just as God is his spiritual self, the comforters are in fact personifications of Job's own sin of obstinate spiritual pride. Outwardly their arguments are fair and plausible, but actually they are a form of self-deceit. 'Three wily hypocrites' therefore becomes an appropriate description.

Now hypocrisy consists in seeming one thing and

being another; its essence therefore is ambiguity, and ambiguity is not difficult to symbolize in music. A drooping pathetic minor third sounds sympathetic; so for that matter does a drooping major third and either might represent true sympathy, but place one against the other and harmonize in triads and you have complete ambiguity and double dealing, which the oily tones of the saxophone make unctuous and odious:

Ex. 13.

Andante doloroso.

Saxophone.



There is a middle section of more vigorous character where they become reproachful but they 'return to their gestures of pretended sympathy', till Job rises and curses God in another descending phrase, Ex. 14 bearing some relationship to Exx. 5 and 8, but with acrid harmony. It is symptomatic of the organic character of the work that all these phrases portraying Job's personality and actions have a family resemblance. Indeed, at a first glance it is easy to mistake them all as mere transformations of the same phrase, but the variations alike in intervals and rhythm are seen on closer scrutiny to amount to more than a 'transformation of theme'.

Ex. 14.



There is a baleful vision of Heaven now usurped by the

host of Hell which gradually fades away to be succeeded by a violin solo of early morning freshness. This is the turning-point of the drama and the beginning of

Scene VI

There enters Elihu, who is young and beautiful. 'Ye are old and I am very young.' Job perceives his sin. The Heavens then open, revealing Job's Spiritual Self again enthroned.

Scene VII

'Ye are old and I am very young.'

Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty.

'Then the Lord answered Job.'

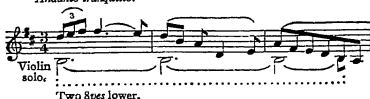
Pavane of the Heavenly Host.

Enter Elihu, who is young and beautiful. Heaven opens again and shows God sitting on His Throne surrounded by the heavenly host.

The flowing rhapsody of the unaccompanied violin settles down into an airy melody:

Ex. 15.

Andante tranquillo.



Two Octs lower.



After Elihu's dance 'Heaven gradually shines behind the stars. Dim figures are seen dancing a solemn dance. As Heaven grows lighter, they are seen to be the Sons of the Morning dancing before God's throne' as in Blake's Plate 14. (This is the stage direction.)

The music of the Pavane consists of—

Ex. 16.

Andante con moto.



Strings, w.-wind, harps, tympani.

a three-bar phrase which alternates and combines with a variant of Ex. 8.

In the old instrumental suites pavanes were followed by galliards. So here, and the next scene opens with a galliard, a quicker dance in a different rhythm.

Scene VII

Satan again appeals to Job's Godhead, claiming the victory, but is repelled and driven down by the Sons of the Morning. Job's household build an altar and worship with musical instruments, while the heavenly dance continues.

Scene VIII

'All the Sons of God shouted for joy.'

Galliard of the Sons of the Morning

'My servant Job shall pray for you.'

Altar Dance and heavenly Pavane.

Satan appeals again to God but is driven down by the Sons of the Morning. Job and his household build an altar and worship God with musical instruments. The heavenly dance continues.

The appearance of Satan to claim his victory over Job and God's denial and sentence of banishment upon him are depicted in eight bars of Satan's music (Ex. 6) and five bars of the music of godhead (Ex. 8). Then the

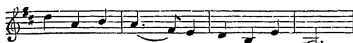
Sons of the Morning drive Satan down during the galliard on this sturdy tune:

Ex. 17.

Allegro pesante



Strings, *marcato*.



The scene changes from Heaven to Earth. Young men and women raise an altar and dance round it. The strings hold a widespread chord of G minor (without the B flat) in its second inversion, through which the oboes weave a tune—

Ex. 18.

Andante tranquillo.



to be joined presently, when Job rises to bless the altar, by Ex. 12 in counterpoint with it. The heavenly dance begins again (Ex. 16), while the dance on earth continues (Ex. 18) and leads to a tableau over a tremendous cadence of clashing diatonic chords such as have been heard in a milder form pianissimo at the first disclosure of Heaven just before the Sarabande. See Ex. 7 for the outline of it.

Scene VIII

Job sits a humbled man in the sunrise of restored prosperity, surrounded by his family, upon whom he bestows his blessing.

Scene IX

'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.'

Epilogue.

Job, an old and humbled man, sits again surrounded by his family. He blesses his children.

Ex. 1 is heard as the curtain goes up on the same scene as the opening. Job's friends come and give him presents. His three daughters enter. How they came to be restored to him is not made clear either in the ballet or in Blake or even in the Bible, which simply states laconically (chapter xlii, v. 13), after a catalogue of his riches, 'He had also seven sons and three daughters', and adds that they were the fairest women in the land. The music falls away to a mellow tissue of sound, very full but very quiet, while the dancers group themselves as in Plates 19 and 20. The Epilogue is a recapitulation of the opening music including the descending triplet figure which belongs to the daughters of Job:

Ex. 19.



The final cadence comes to rest on B flat, but the key feeling has been G minor. The horns hold a dominant pedal-point D up to within a dozen bars of the end. This resolves on to a softer pedal-point G held for three bars by the violas, and then almost imperceptibly through some fluidly progressing harmony the music subsides on to a B flat held by contrabasses and tympani. The actual chord of B flat is delayed for another bar and is even then reached on a weak half-beat so as to make it as unobtrusive as possible. The instruments fade out one after the other till only the violoncellos and basses are holding their B flat *niente*. The counterpoint moves steadily in quavers till quite near the end producing chord progressions as it goes, but the fundamental harmony has been moving very

slowly as already described, and though anything like a conventional full close, however elaborately disguised, is avoided, yet the sense of finality is complete. The balance of keys is not achieved by mechanical means, and B flat major, lying as it does on that slightly higher plane than G minor, is, when so reached, like the keel of the home-bound boat running its nose up on the shore.

Riders to the Sea

WAGNER in his day made a great fuss about a distinction which he drew between opera and music-drama. Actually all opera is precisely music-drama and in its early days was called *dramma per musica*; it is from its nature a play carried on either in or with music. Wagner wished to cut clear of certain associations that had grown round the word 'opera', one such set of associations implying formal division into recitative, aria, and ensemble. This formal implication he specially wished to avoid and to substitute for it his *unendliche Melodie* and a symphonic style of writing for the orchestra, just as Vaughan Williams preferred to call the ballet *Job* a masque because of certain associations of the word 'ballet'. Such terminological preferences, though not in the last resort logically tenable, have this much justification: that they imply differences of emphasis; within a composite art like opera, where to the normal opposition between words and tones there are added the complicating factors of plot, scenery, mime, and movement, the equilibrium between them will be struck at different points in different instances. The problem of the operatic composer is always to reconcile such divergent claims. The first and most

fundamental of them is that of pace: drama moves normally at a rate faster than real life, it is carried on in dialogue uttered only a little slower than conversational speech, it develops by concentration; in music, on the other hand, the mere addition of tone to a spoken sentence in itself slows up the utterance, and the melodic line asserts musical claims that interfere with the normal speed and shape and rhythm of the words to which it is set, and music as such develops by expansion to such an extent that action has often to be held up on the stage in order to allow time enough to the music to make its points in its own musical way. The history of opera is the tale of the different ways in which this equilibrium has been successfully struck, these competing claims reconciled. One way, that of German *Singspiel* and English comic opera, is to work on two planes alternately and break openly from speech into song, and vice versa. Next above this in point of musical saturation is the division into recitative and air; farther on comes the complete absorption of the text into music, as in Wagner and Puccini. Wagner thought that he was acting in defence of the verbal text in floating it, as it were, on a sea of orchestral sound, but in point of fact in his music-drama music has retained its position as the senior partner, and those who are keen to uphold the claims of the poem as well as that of dramatic verisimilitude may legitimately declare that in the upshot they get no better treatment from Wagner than from so 'operatic' a composer as Verdi.

Now opera came into being at the Renaissance as the result of early experiments in the recitation of Greek tragedy. Aristotle, generalizing from the experience of the Greeks themselves in presenting plays,

mentions two features of tragedy, which we can recognize as necessary under the condition of their presentation in a large open-air theatre. Tragedy, he says, is the representation of a serious action which has a certain size and impressiveness (*μίμησις πραξέως σπουδαίας καὶ μέγεθος ἐχούσης*), and it is presented with certain embellishments (*ἡδύσμενα*) among which were the musical elements of rhythm and melody and whatever the Greeks meant by harmony (which was certainly not what we mean). This implies a kind of quasi-musical delivery—intoning or recitative. But music in the full sense was also used in certain parts, notably in the chanting of the chorus who commented on the action in set pieces. The tone of the human speaking voice tends to change in pitch under pressure of emotion—to drop when it is serious or impressive, to rise even to a scream when it is excited, and to do both under the conflicting interplay of changing emotions in a complicated situation. So again we reach recitative, declamation, and rhapsody, all of which imply some sort of melodic line (*μέλος*) instead of the dry tones of ordinary speech. The Florentine experimenters of the sixteenth century, in trying to find the appropriate kind of recitative for the newly discovered classical dramas, hit on precisely the ‘embellished’ speech in which the voice spoke its words to notes of different pitch from which it could break at the intenser moments into song, as any ballad singer among the medieval minstrels could have told them. Here, in fact, was recitative and aria, and here was *unendliche Melodie*; here indeed was music drama or opera.

This same thing is what Vaughan Williams has done in *Riders to the Sea*. To increase the impressiveness and the emotional compulsion of the original play of

J. M. Synge he has assigned notes of definite pitch to all its lines. It is an opera in recitative, and the voice part never takes wing in song save perhaps at the consummation of the tragedy, where Maurya's words rise on a curve of melody *largamente* over diatonic chords. Elsewhere the musician makes himself the servant and follower of the poet rather than leader and master. In this sense *Riders to the Sea* may claim to be music-drama. It is a word-for-word setting of a play; the composer has taken no melodic liberties but has been faithful to every vocal inflexion of the speaking voice, yet he has at the same time converted it from elocution into music. But for all his restraint he has done what only music can do—crystallized its poignant emotions, heightened their expression, and suffused it all with a tenderness that accomplishes for us that purge by pity (κάθαρσις δι' ἐλέου) of which Aristotle spoke.

It is not necessary to accept the jurisdiction of what Dr. Colles calls the 'Poetic Supremacy Act of 1887'¹ sponsored by Wolf, to see that in an appropriate case a composer may accept its restraints and still achieve what can only be done by music. Many who refuse assent to the Poetic Supremacy Act for song still demand its jurisdiction for the stage. A large section of English musical opinion is hostile to opera as an art-form on the ground that it spoils two things both in themselves good—music and drama. Sir Walford Davies is not the only eminent musician to take this view (Dr. Harvey Grace is another), but he has most recently restated the case against opera and he calls it 'still an astonishing and phenomenal enormity'.² But he has found in *Riders to the Sea* a dramatic music

¹ *Oxford History of Music*, vol. vii, pp. 392-3.

² *The Pursuit of Music* (1935), p. 381.

which poses the problem of sung dialogue in so direct a fashion that its sincerity elicits some hope even among his fears. He says: 'Pages 53-6, as one reads them, seem to me one of the most moving musical utterances of a most moving dramatic situation ever written.'¹ I agree, and my only qualification would be that these pages owe a measure of their power to the fact that in them a greater melodiousness contrasts with the previous parlando passages, that the voice at last throbs with tone to an extent not hitherto permitted to it, that in a word we come here to arioso instead of recitative, though no violence is done to the speech-rhythm which has been so faithfully followed up till now.

If, then, Vaughan Williams has submitted himself to the dramatic clauses of the Poetic Supremacy Act, will he satisfy those other musicians who disregard the Act and repudiate its prohibitions? For them the vast dramatic possibilities of counterpoint and the great psychological subtlety of music are the justification of opera. All sides of a complex situation, which in drama have to be presented seriatim, can in music be presented at one and the same time by the concurrent melodies of vocal part-writing and by the use of the *Leitmotiv*, instrumental colour and repetition of theme—technical devices which give to the orchestra a resourcefulness in dramatic allusion possessed by no other partnership of the arts. All these are to be found in *Riders to the Sea*, but the aesthetic justification of the parlando as opposed to the cantando style is to be found in the appropriateness of the method to the subject-matter. Synge's play is a tragedy in undertones. At its opening Nora and Cathleen converse in low voices to avoid rousing the old woman, and this subdued start

¹ In a letter to me quoted here by his permission.

sets the tone for the whole play. There is no place here for steady streams of tone or strong-winged flights of melody; all is broken—muttered almost, and Vaughan Williams's themes reproduce the sorrow-haunted atmosphere of the Irish cottage by the implacable sea in the downward droop of their contour. Only after the final catastrophe, when the sea can do no more to hurt or harm these islanders, do the phrases reverse their trend and begin to rise.¹

The method derives not from Wolf but from Moussorgsky, but the opera nearest akin to *Riders to the Sea* is Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Here we have a similarly subdued dialogue and a drier, less melodious recitation than we get in *Boris Godunov*. In *Pelléas et Mélisande* the characters are shadowy almost to the point of unreality. In *Boris Godunov* they are real and solid. In *Riders to the Sea* they are real but oppressed and overwhelmed. The motives of the composer in each case are therefore alike in that they all three wish to reflect in music the natural intonations of speech, but different in so far as the emotions to be conveyed are different. Moussorgsky aims at realistic portraiture, Debussy at the creation of people in a world of shadows. Vaughan Williams aims at a true presentation of real people (like Moussorgsky) and (like Debussy) at the creation of an enveloping atmosphere of half tones. In dimensions, dramatic method, and lay-out for

¹ That is, broadly speaking, Maurya so constantly croons half to herself that her phrases usually begin with the rise of a third, and this initial rise influences the shape of her themes. Bartley speaks in level tones; the two girls, whose emotions are unstable, are less consistent but mostly follow the natural rise in pitch of the voice from the start of a sentence. It is not, however, the verbal phrases of which I am thinking but the accompanying orchestral themes which show a predominantly downward trend.

small orchestra and female chorus it shows a close kinship with Holst's *Savitri*.

It is quite unlike anything else that he has done. *Hugh the Drover* is a pure romantic opera, *Sir John in Love* near akin to a folk opera, *The Poisoned Kiss*, which was to follow, a pure comic opera, in form as well as subject. This is a tragic music-drama in one act. It was sketched in 1926 and finished in the following year, but was not published till 1936. It is lightly scored with only one each of the wood-wind, except that there is a second flute, and the only clarinet is a bass clarinet; two horns and one trumpet are all the brass, and a limited number of strings (not more than two double-basses and the rest in proportion) is prescribed; the percussion includes a Sea Machine. There is also a wordless chorus of female voices in four parts. The stage directions of the original play are occasionally modified in the opera and a few sentences have been omitted.

The scene is set in the kitchen of a cottage on an island off the west coast of Ireland. The daily business of the inhabitants must be carried on by sea, and the sea, as all seafarers know, takes its toll of human life. The sea is the unseen protagonist of this drama, and its ceaseless murmur, its swelling, the strident impact of restless green water is heard at the outset:

Ex. 1.
Lento moderato.
Fl. & Vlms.

(a)

Horns.

Strgs.

(b) FL.

Vln. FL.

Vla.

Cor Ang.

Horn.

(c) Strings.

This is almost a *Leitmotiv*, though it is not always presented whole, as Wagner would do it, when the sound of the sea blows through the open door or is uppermost in the mind of the persons of the play. Sometimes only the bass (c) is heard, sometimes with rhythmic variations the drooping phrase of the upper part.

When the curtain rises Cathleen is busy in the room and finally sits down to her spinning-wheel; the only music is a long bare line of melody supported by an occasional chord. The door opens and the sound of the sea is heard—a version of Ex. 1. Cathleen's younger sister Nora enters and asks 'Where is she?'. 'She' is their mother Maurya, who at the moment is lying down 'and maybe sleeping if she's able'. Nora produces a bundle from under her shawl. It contains 'a shirt and a plain stocking got off a drowned man in Donegal'. The question is: Was that drowned man their brother Michael, and could his body have been washed away so far north as Donegal? All the dialogue in which they debate this possibility and the advisability of telling their mother anything about the find is carried on to a descending phrase related to Ex. 1 but not used specifically again:

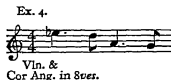
Ex. 2. Cor Anglais.

p

But though this is not a *Leitmotiv* at all, it sets the shape for much of the closely related thematic material of which the opera is built. The next motif, however, recurs when either of the women refers to Michael's clean burial at sea and, as God is invoked when such thoughts are uttered, it carries with it a prayer:



The door blows open—Ex. 1 is heard—and Cathleen looks out: is the sea bad enough to stop Bartley (now the only surviving brother) from crossing and taking the horses to Galway Fair? 'I won't stop him,' says Nora, and adds that 'Herself does be saying prayers half through the night and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute' (Ex. 3). Two other variants of the sea-motif, Ex. 1, are used to describe the state of wind and tide, with wider intervals and more agitated rhythm:



and



The girls debate whether to open the parcel and see if they can identify the clothes, but they are afraid they may be interrupted by the appearance of their mother. So they hide it for the moment in the peat-loft. Much of their smothered and hasty dialogue is set *senza misura* to light semiquavers often without accompaniment, sometimes with a wisp of counter-point. As soon as the bundle is hidden and Cathleen is descending the ladder from the loft Maurya appears and chides them for being extravagant with the fuel—isn't there enough turf already down for the rest of the day? Maurya's principal motif is a phrase of which the significant and most persistent portion is the first three notes rising the interval of a third:

Ex 6.

Lento.

This is played by muted violins on its first appearance, when Nora says, 'She is moving about on the bed', but when Maurya actually appears it is heard more positively on the bassoon, as it is subsequently in the opera. Maurya, sitting by the fire, begins to think about Bartley's journey to the mainland with the horses. Surely he will not go with the wind rising from the south-west? A new, long, trailing line of descending melody accompanies her reflections on her surviving son, but it seems to be less Bartley's motif than Maurya's reflections on the menfolk she has lost, for it occurs again first when she has the intuition that he will not return alive and again after his body has been brought in, when it is sung by the keening women.



Bartley himself comes in in a hurry; he wants a bit of rope for a halter. Maurya (Ex. 6) is unwilling for him to take it—it may be wanted for burying Michael if he should be washed up. She tries also to deter him from going on his journey, and as she becomes more urgent in her pleading the orchestral texture thickens, the music becomes more rhythmic, and the pace ‘*poco più mosso*’. Bartley ignores her words and turns to Cathleen with instructions what to do on the farm while he is away. Then he turns his attention to the voyage. Is the boat coming to the pier? The music for this is derived from Ex. 1—first the triads in the bass (*c*), and then a dotted-note phrase related to (*b*). From these two is derived a progression of triads that is primarily but not invariably associated with the drowning of Michael.



Bartley goes, but Maurya does not give him her blessing; instead she cries out in despair that they will not see him again. The girls lose patience with the

old woman and all her ill-omened words (allusion to Ex. 7). Wisely they find something for her to do. Bartley has gone off not only without his mother's blessing, but without his food, so Cathleen bids Maurya take the bread and intercept him at the well on his way down to the sea with the horses. A new movement begins in the bass, an insistent round-and-round figure:

Ex. 9.

Poco più mosso.

Fragments of this figure and variations of Ex. 8 appear up and down the score. Maurya takes a stick and hobbles off. This is the opportunity for Cathleen and Nora to examine the bundle. They conduct a quick conversation prefaced by Ex. 8, at first unaccompanied but subsequently against an undulating line of counterpoint.

They open the bundle:

Ex. 10

Moderato con moto.

Ex. 10 is a musical notation for a scene. It features three staves. The top staff is for Fl. Ob. (Flute Oboe) and Str. (Strings). The middle staff is for the vocal parts, with the lyrics 'It's Mich - ael, Cath - leen, it's' written above the notes. The bottom staff is for the Tutti (all instruments). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (f, p, f). The tempo is marked 'Moderato con moto'.



So easily under the stress of emotion does the voice rise from parlando to singing, from recitative to arioso; neither of the two sopranos (Cathleen and Nora) has touched a G before. They quickly relapse into recitative as they discuss the dropped stitches in the knitted stocking that confirm their fears. But Ex. 10 returns as Cathleen thinks of the pity of a great rower and fisher floating away in the far north and leaving nothing behind of himself but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking. Again this more impassioned singing is broken off because they hear Maurya returning. A mere whispered chord supports their hasty conversation while they hide the bundle again. Ex. 6 announces Maurya's entrance. She begins to keen. The girls question her, did she see Bartley, did she give him his bread, but all they can get out of her in reply is a cry that she has seen 'the fearfulest thing', an omen of the worst. Cathleen goes to the window to see if she can see Bartley. Yes, he is riding the mare, and the grey pony is following behind. She now presses her mother to tell them what it is she has seen. Maurya's vision is accompanied by consecutive $6/4$ chords. She declares she has seen Michael riding behind Bartley. Her story is told in detail to an insistent $7/4$ rhythm:

Bartley came first, and something choked the words in her throat when she tried to give him the blessing she had withheld in the cottage, and then on the grey pony she beheld Michael with fine clothes upon him and new shoes on his feet. Cathleen now begins to keen and in her anguish she touches G sharp. The orchestra plays loud chords, swaying chords of the sixth in the dotted rhythm that has been so prominent throughout.

Maurya now begins a long solo over a new figure that is extensively used in combination with a derivative of Ex. 7—note that it begins with Maurya's characteristic rising third.

Ex. 11.
Lento moderato.

Fl. & Strgs. *p*

Ob.

[Bartley will be lost now]

f

Str. div.

She rehearses the number of her sons and their deaths—for she regards Bartley as already lost. The sound of the chorus is heard for the first time, off stage, keening in the distance. There is a momentary interruption as Cathleen and Nora catch its sound and hear a cry from the shore. Maurya resumes, and the chorus increases from two to four parts, while the orchestra plays Ex. 1 (c), the groundbass of the sea; to that is soon added (a), and when Maurya relates how the dripping body of her son Patch was brought home the first four bars of Ex. 1 are reproduced as they were first heard.

The door opens and old women come in to keen.
The score is now dominated by the figure—

Ex. 12.

Largo.

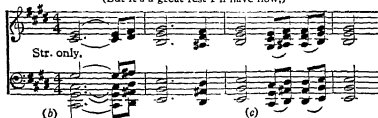


which in one form or another constantly recurs till the end of the opera. The action quickens, though the dialogue continues at the same steady rate of declamation over Ex. 12. The girls tell Maurya about Michael and hand her the bundle of his clothes as proof that he has been found, and the old women tell the girls that what they see approaching is a cortège bearing the body of Bartley, who was knocked over into the sea by the grey pony and carried out to the rocks by the surf. The body is brought in and laid on the table: Maurya goes to its head and begins, 'They are all gone now and there isn't anything more the sea can do for me.' The chorus commences to keen over Ex. 1. She takes holy water to a solemn progression consisting of superimposed triads, Ex. 13 (a); the tonality is poised between C sharp minor and E major as Maurya reaches the ultimate calm of stoical resignation, Ex. 13 (b) and (c):

Ex. 13.

(a) Fl.

Ex. 13.

Più lento. (But it's a great rest I'll have now.)

This becomes arioso in spite of the interjections of Cathleen and Nora, who continue in the same slow sonorous vein, remarking to each other that their mother is getting old and broken. Maurya herself, however, breaks off in free declamation as she passes from C sharp into F minor. When she reverts to sustained singing for her prayer for the souls of all alive, the key becomes a clear E major, and the accompaniment is like the sustained chords of an organ. The keeners have a passage *poco animato* before Maurya speaks again of Michael and Bartley. The keeners sing phrases of Ex. 7, until the signature once more changes to four sharps and Ex. 13 (c) is heard against Maurya's last words: 'No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.' The stage darkens but a gust of wind blows open the door and the sea is heard again (Ex. 1). A solo soprano voice is heard off stage as the rays of the setting sun shine in through the door. The voice sings two strands of tune compounded of many of the figures that have been heard—the dotted note figure and derivatives from Exx. 7 and 9—while the orchestra sustains and augments a sequence of chords taken from Ex. 13, but now smoothed out in rhythm so as to come to a standstill on an almost inaudible chord of E as the stage becomes quite dark.

The Poisoned Kiss

The Poisoned Kiss was composed during 1927-8, but had to wait several years before it was produced on any stage. Finally, after a certain amount of revision, in which some numbers were scrapped and others added, it was put on by a company consisting mainly of professionals but dependent for its staffing on an organization of amateurs such as has been responsible for a great many interesting operatic enterprises in this country. Oxford and Cambridge have both been forward in producing such operas as the few stable operatic organizations in English musical life—the Carl Rosa Company, the various syndicates that have held sway at Covent Garden, and even Miss Baylis's remarkable enterprise at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells—could hardly be expected to undertake with any hope of support from their respective publics. In recent times Cambridge has specialized in Purcell, Mozart, and Handel. Oxford has revived Monteverdi, experimented in Slav opera (Dvořák, Smetana, and Rimsky-Korsakoff), and, as already related, undertaken a performance of *Sir John in Love*. Scotland has also shown operatic initiative, Edinburgh having produced operas by Hamish MacCunn and Sir Donald Tovey, Glasgow having revived the neglected operas of Berlioz.

It was appropriate that *The Poisoned Kiss* should have its first performance (on 12 May 1936) at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, for Dr. Vaughan Williams is a Cambridge man—he is an honorary fellow of Trinity—and though in no other country in the world would a composer of like eminence be so ignored by the public operatic organizations as to be dependent on the casual

interest of amateur organizations for a trial performance of his stage works, it is quite in keeping with English traditions and the honourable part played in them by the amateur that the Cambridge 'syndicate' of local amateur and professional musicians should have the honour of launching his first comic opera. Amateur societies find their chief sustenance in the comic operas of Sullivan and German. There seems no reason, if tunefulness is a determining factor in their choice, why *The Poisoned Kiss* should not be added to their repertory. To avoid misconception it should perhaps be added that the word 'amateur', as I have used it in referring to the amateur tradition, must not be too strictly interpreted as though music was organized like football, cricket, or rowing. These valuable local organizations are dependent for their guidance on the local professionals, but it is no part of a college organist's professional duties to conduct a comic opera any more than it is part of their professional work for his lay-clerks to sing in one. The true amateur, the local professional, and the true operatic professional imported from London can, on these occasions, work together with the most valuable results, and there is no need for their strict segregation as in the cricket pavilions and boat-houses of England. In default of municipal or state opera-houses, such as are found on the Continent, home-grown opera is dependent on these quasi-amateur organizations for its chances of coming to life. When they have shown that there is life in an opera, perhaps the professional organizations may take it up. It is one of the misfortunes of our operatic history that the Savoy operas are restricted to one professional company, and that at the same time that one successful company is restricted

in its operations to the Savoy repertory. There seems no hope of establishing anything like an Opéra Comique in England until such conditions have changed. But that is a big question, too big to be discussed here except in so far as the future of *The Poisoned Kiss* depends on its finding the right home for itself.

It has been referred to as a comic opera. And so it is, not only in respect of its light and entertaining character, but also by reason of its formal construction with set pieces and spoken dialogue, the *Singspiel* form that has always been the preference of English taste since the days of the masque in the seventeenth century. Its character, however, is more closely defined in its official description as a romantic extravaganza. The two elements, the romance and the extravagance, the constant juxtaposition of magic and modernism, the lyrical music and the witty words, set up an unstable equilibrium that adds piquancy to both. The libretto has, however, been adversely criticized, not for its romance but for its extravagance. It must therefore be scrutinized, though it is well to bear in mind that the author was writing not for cold print but for the theatre, and that in the theatre her shafts and sallies, her witticisms and topical allusions, found their mark and raised their laughs at once.

The libretto was founded, as a note prefixed to the score informs us, on incidents taken from a story called 'The Poison Maid' which is found in Richard Garnett's collection of short stories called *The Twilight of the Gods*. (But it is a far cry from *Gotterdammerung* to *The Poisoned Kiss*!) Garnett himself was apparently indebted to another short story, 'Rapaccini's Daughter', in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, though according to a note in the 1888 edition of

Garnett he wrote his story in 'entire forgetfulness' of Hawthorne's tale 'which nevertheless he had certainly read'. It may very well be that what alienated the critics of Miss Evelyn Sharp's libretto was precisely the simple innocence of a nineteenth-century story, garnished though it was by satire of contemporary events and fashions such as have afforded matter for comic treatment on the stage from Aristophanes onwards, and in music from *The Beggar's Opera* and Mozart to Gilbert and Sullivan and *Cog d'Or*. We are not amused, however, by childish fantasies to-day. There has been a change of taste. Fiction is earnest, and when it is not dealing with imaginary crime it portrays slices of real life, and whether it is proletarian life or high life that is the novelist's subject, his method is realistic. Victorian fiction, we say, is mere escapism. Love's young dream is a dream no longer but a compensatory erotic fantasy, and if we wish to suspend the laws of causation as we know them we do not retreat into the magic of the past but into the brave new worlds of Wellsian speculation. There is, in fact, a certain impatience with the machinery of magic, and if in reading Garnett's 'The Poison Maid' one smiles at the fanciful twist of the story, there is also in our smile a trace of superciliousness. It may be conceded, too, that in the second act of the opera the magic machinery, as operated by the somewhat clumsy antics of Hob, Gob, and Lob, whose function it is to precipitate the fatal kiss, creaks a little and magical machines should no more creak than their latest electrical equivalent. It may also be admitted that in a few instances the author's usually felicitous touch in setting a piece of modern slang in sharp antithesis to some piece of highfalutin magic fumbles for a moment

over some topical allusion that seems out of the picture. Hob, Gob, and Lob disguised as journalists afford an example, which is in marked contrast to the extremely funny antithesis to be found in the lines of Dipsacus, the professional magician and father of the bride. But Hob, Gob, and Lob are necessary not merely for musical reasons but for the symmetry of the plot.

This symmetry is an element of strength in a well-constructed libretto. The book, whether you like it or not, is so laid out in three acts as to give each character opportunity to define him or herself in set solos or in ensemble numbers, while the opposing forces of Magician versus Empress are disposed so as to give a different balance in each act. Thus Dipsacus leads off the first act and his influence dominates it. The two lovers, Amaryllus (lyrical tenor), the Empress's son, and Tormentilla (soprano), the Magician's daughter, have the second act almost to themselves, except for the undercurrent provided throughout by the love affair between their two respective servants Galanthus, light tenor and a bit of a clown, and Angelica, soubrette with all the characteristics of a chit—a ready tongue, an interest in men, and a passion for romance in story or cinema. The Empress Persicaria (contralto) descends upon the last act and extricates the plot from the crisis which it reached when the poisoned kiss was exchanged between the two lovers at the end of Act II. Note the pretty idea of conferring botanical names on all the principal creatures of this fantasy. Hob, Gob, and Lob are the personal attendants of Dipsacus; their opposite numbers attached to the Empress's suite are three Mediums who pursue the psychic business that was fashionable in Bond Street a few years ago. These six persons of the play are cast according

to voice and give the composer scope for trios and sextets. In the end each character is paired off with his opposite number, and after a momentary flash from the Empress—'Is this a night club? What means this disgraceful scene in my palace?'—who has forgotten the force of her own example in burying the hatchet and reuniting herself with Dipsacus, all the principals and chorus sing a grand ensemble 'alla hornpipe' to the refrain:

Love has conquered,
Hearts united,
Wrong is righted,
Won by capture,
Thrilled with rapture,
Wedding guests are all invited;
Do not tarry,
Come and marry,
Love triumphant,
Hearts united.

This jingling verse is in the ordinary comic-opera vein and the hornpipe measure ties up, as a concerted finale should, all the threads of the opera. But the theme of love triumphant is more than the skeleton of a piece for the theatre and it lifts the lover's music into true romance. For the kernel of the opera is the conquest of hate by love. Tormentilla has been brought up on poisons in order that her first kiss shall destroy the man to whom she gives it. Dipsacus has kept her apart from the world in order that he may chose her victim for her, the son of the Empress. His plot succeeds up to the point of the exchange of the fatal kiss and then miscarries because true love is more potent than poison. Here is the core of romance at the heart of the extravaganza. In this outline the libretto follows closely the plot of Garnett's story. The root idea of a poisonous maiden comes from Hawthorne; Garnett embodied it

in the idea of revenge worked by the parent of one lover upon the parent of the other; Miss Sharp created all the subsidiary characters, put the story into dramatic form and served it up in a modern, not to say topical, setting. She was peculiarly well qualified to discharge this task of a new W. S. Gilbert, for her literary career has been divided between the writing of imaginative stories—she was a contributor to the famous *Yellow Book*—and journalism for the *Manchester Guardian* and other papers. Her sympathies are at the opposite pole from Gilbert's, but she has his way of touching off a fashionable foible with a shaft of satire, and in so far as a poisonous bride is an antimony her subject leaves her with a Gilbertian situation to deal with. But the element of romance differentiates her libretto from anything that Gilbert ever did outside the *Yeoman of the Guard*, in which human feeling succeeded in breaking through. The sister of Cecil Sharp, with whom he was closely associated in the folk-music revival, was a natural collaborator for Dr. Vaughan Williams; the writer of fairy tales and children's books has a light touch for handling magic; the wife of H. W. Nevinson and herself a politician from the days of Women's Suffrage onwards has the salt of satire, so potent for keeping comedy sweet, in her literary economy. A libretto from such a writer is no colourless theatrical construction; it is playful, it is strongly knit, and it is witty. English people do not like wit; they prefer humour, of which they are less afraid, and it is a tenable criticism to urge that the comedy in the composer's music is more often humorous than witty. But there are a number of clever witticisms in the score, notably in the music for the *Mediums* and the deliberately sentimental duet put

into the mouths of Dipsacus and Persicaria in the last act (cf. Ex. 19). But no comic opera is the worse for being both witty and humorous at once. In the last resort a composer is responsible for any libretto he chooses to set, and that Dr. Vaughan Williams found this one inspiring is apparent from the music it elicited from him.

The Overture contains a number of the chief airs in the opera which are loosely strung together. The composer directs that it be played with the house lights up so that it shall not hush all conversation in the auditorium and so produce too reverent an approach to the absurdities that are to follow. This subconscious assimilation of music is in point of fact the best preparation for an evening in which effortless entertainment and solid artistic pleasure are to be combined. For when the various tunes occur in their dramatic context they are at once fresh and familiar to the mind of the listener. Fresh because he has not in any degree learned them, familiar because they have in fact already fallen upon his ear. These tunes are in themselves fresh enough in all conscience and, though they cannot be called familiar, they are at any rate cast in the old lyrical manner derived from English folk-song and English polyphony which long ago the composer evolved for his own personal and distinctive utterance. We have never heard them before but their idiom is encouragingly familiar.

Act I

The scene is the heart of a remote forest. Dipsacus's house is discernible in the darkness, and we know what it is because it bears the sign: *Dipsacus: Necromancer*,

Consultations Daily. Another sign warning us what to expect bears the legend 'Beware of the Serpent'. The business in hand is to get the sun to rise. Forest creatures utter deterrent noises over grisly forest music—a modern Wolf's Glen in fact without diminished sevenths but with plenty of chromaticism. There is a little trouble about the sunrise but Dipsacus comes out, drives off the nocturnal chorus with a gesture and ushers in the dawn. Gallanthus next appears in a nervy condition after a night spent in this spell-bound wood. The least noise—and plenty of noises are provided—frightens him and his music goes backwards and forwards between $2/4$ and $4/4$ time. During his agitation the sun rises and a window in Dipsacus's house is flung open; Angelica the servant maid appears at it, heralded by an arpeggio of the subdominant ninth from the harp. The scena which follows may be said to be in G. The signature oscillates between one sharp and two flats, but the G major of Angelica's aubade is strongly tinged with E minor. After the harp a flute cadenza and a little tune create a musical atmosphere something like that of the beginning of *The Lark Ascending*:

Ex. 1.

Andante con moto.

Oboe, later horn.



This is daybreak right enough, and Angelica soon comes out of the house with the early morning appurtenances of pail and broom. The note of deliberate bathos, to be sounded time and again through the opera, is struck at once.

Day is dawning,
Folks are yawning.

This couplet is sung to a melody derived from (a); the continuation of her laborious salute to the dawn makes use of (b). She soon breaks off like any normally constituted servant-maid into a grumble about her 'place'—in light recitative, this, and finally she encounters the dithering Gallanthus. They exchange information and compare notes in spoken dialogue. They get on fine. Soon there is talk of love and they break into a duet 'It's really time', a verse each to a simple ballad melody of sixteen bars and then a verse together. The melody is only simple in sound. It is not susceptible of analysis according to any formula of *a b a*, but the constituent phrases make allusions to each other's intervals and patterns and so yield a strong organic tune. The affair which is progressing so smoothly and rapidly is interrupted by the appearance of three hobgoblins, Hob, Gob, and Lob, and the forest chorus of witches, goblins, and animals. They complain of Dipsacus and their terms of service. When the magician himself appears he upbraids them for slackness on this, the day of days, when his long cherished plans of revenge are about to mature. He includes Angelica in his strictures. To her excuse that she has not before been in service with a necromancer he replies in a patter song 'I'm a Sorcerer Bold', in which she insinuates some comments, as do the Hob-

goblins. The rhythm of the song matches the dance with which its verses alternate:

Ex. 2.

Allegro.

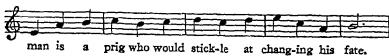


The opera is thus gathering speed—and variety of melody. A duet for Angelica and Dipsacus follows, but since it too consists of vivacious patter its inclusion is optional.

The time has now come to introduce the hero. Amaryllus and Gallanthus walk on to the stage vacated for them and straightway begin a duet on the Prince's susceptibility to female charm:

Ex. 3.

Allegro moderato.



Note how the caesura in the fourth bar of a ten-bar phrase varies the balance without upsetting it. This is matched in Gallanthus's retort (a bright G major against this Aeolian modal E) by a threefold sequence in the enumeration of Amaryllus's former flames. But this time it is the real thing, declares Amaryllus in dialogue, for he has seen Tormentilla and believing her to be in danger has struck her pet cobra, not yet realizing that young lady's abnormal tastes. At this moment Tormentilla enters carrying her pet and in

a fury with the aggressor who has hit it. With one woman in a temper and one young man in love, the other woman ready to take advantage of anything that may develop and her lover dithering with excitement, the situation is ready for a quartet of conflicting emotions (two sopranos and two tenors). This changes half-way through from a quasi-patter (*allegro vivace*) to a lullaby (*andantino*) when Tormentilla sits down and rocks the injured cobra to sleep. Here we feel the full force of the antithesis between innocence and poison that is the dominating idea of Hawthorne's tale. Tormentilla sings:

Ex. 4.

Lull - a - by love-ly ser - pent of mine,



Strings.

Sub - tle thy dreams full of plea - sures ma - lign



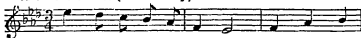
Then as the cobra falls into a peaceful doze she asks for a soothing drink for herself (vitriol or cyanide) and the others join in over this tonic pedal and narcotic harmony. The words, however, are not in the least like soothing syrup: Tormentilla continues the lullaby

and Amaryllus asks to be allowed to join in, but Angelica says, 'I wish she'd stop that row and drink it up,' while Gallanthus's contribution to the queer symposium is 'O damn his eye, why can't he stop his blasted lullaby'. The quartet finishes more animatedly with a discussion of the poison cup.

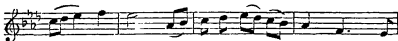
The plot has now to thicken and the two principals to fall properly in love. So we have a duet. As this is probably the loveliest song melody in the opera it must be quoted. There are the usual three verses—one each and one together. The two sets of words under the tune show that bitter-sweetness is still the prevalent and piquant flavour.

Ex. 5.

Andante sostenuto (sentimentally).



AMARYLLUS: Blue lark-spur in a gar-den, White clouds in
TORMENTILLA: Black hen-bane in a thuck-et, Slime of the



sum - mer skies, A sea-gull paus-ing wing-stretch'd, The
ser - pent's trail, A hood-ed cob-ra up - reared, The



love in a wo - - man's eyes, These things in
sting in a scor - pion's tail, These things in



A - ma - ryl - lus' sight . . do bring con - tin - - u -
Tor-men-ti-la's sight . . do bring con - tin - - u -



- al de - light.
- al de - light.

After another optional song by Amaryllus on the subject of his previous infatuations there is a dramatic number in which things of various sorts happen. Dipsacus gets to work on his magic business, raises a storm, and keeps the lovers apart by a spell. Tormentilla wants to know of her father what all the fuss is about. Dipsacus then explains the story of his early love and his plot for vengeance by means of the poison kiss which Tormentilla is to deliver on the son of his enemy. Pompous as ever, Dipsacus delivers himself in a mock eighteenth-century ballad in B minor (except that the leading notes are all flat). Tormentilla listens with growing understanding and hardening resistance. She declines to be a party to the plan: 'Why should I slay this innocent boy for the sake of your two-penny half-penny love-affair twenty years ago?' There is an optional trio in patter (presto) in which father and daughter rage furiously across the plebeian comments of Angelica. Tormentilla now faces the fact that she must on no account see Amaryllus again and laments her predicament in a wistful song, 'Oh, who would be unhappy me?' This is as detachable as, and no more unintelligible in its allusions to the context, than many a Sullivan air from the Savoy operas, Yum-Yum's 'The sun and I', for instance, in *The Mikado*.

Tormentilla's relations with her father are now so strained that parting is inevitable. The two girls look forward to exchanging the solitudes of the forest for the metropolitan life of Golden Town. Angelica is prepared to finance their exile by taking with her the philosopher's stone from the dining-room mantelpiece, which she has had to dust morning by morning—this detail comes from Garnett. She rubs it and straight-way summons milliners and messengers with all such

requisites for travel as are to be found in Fortnum and Mason's shop. These milliners and messengers fill up the stage for the final scene in which Dipsacus pronounces an order of banishment upon them in a resounding spell, which is taken up by all and brings down the curtain.

Act II

The second act takes us to Tormentilla's lodgings in Golden Town, which is according to the stage directions either an Eastern or a Cubist city. It is sunset, and there is a short orchestral introduction in keeping with the sensuous bewitchment of the time and place:

Ex. 6.
Andante moderato. Flutes.

Horn *fp*

Harp *pp*

Clarinet,
Bassoon.

This music reappears later in the act when Amaryllus, drawn by the spells of Hob, Gob, and Lob, approaches Tormentilla's dwelling. But at the moment the mood is not pursued. On the contrary we have a Flower Girls' chorus, which inevitably seems like

a sly allusion to the Flower Maidens in *Parsifal*, the Bridesmaids in *Der Freischütz*, and more faintly the Bridesmaids in *Ruddigore*. It is in fact, however, a parody of musical comedy, and a footnote in the score directs that the scene be played in an exaggeration of that style, which it defines as 'with perfunctory charm'. The music begins—

Ex. 7.
Allegretto.
 Clarinets.
 Horn. *p*
 Strings.

but changes to a luscious D flat major for the entry of the voices, which sing

Here we come, our hands full laden,
 Bringing gifts to charm a maiden.

and then adding in an aside for the sake of the bathos

(Not for fun, if she but knew it,
 Only 'cause we're paid to do it.)

This number leads straight into a waltz song for Angelica and chorus. The waltz is ingeniously constructed with alternations of phrases that vary in length—the first two are respectively of six and five bars—while inside the phrases groups of two crotchets set up a cross rhythm across the bar-line, or alternatively there is a snatch of tune in ordinary *lum-tum-tum* waltz rhythm. And there is syncopation—both the ordinary sort and the jazz kind in which the accent falls on the subdivisions of a beat. Only an extended

example could show the use of all these devices, but a few bars will indicate some of them:

Ex. 8.

Allegro.

They fill the whole place from at - tic to

Clarinetts

Strings.

base - ment, to say no - thing of

Note how beside the alternation of two-beat and three-beat rhythm the voice places its caesura a bar later than the accompaniment where it occurs normally at exactly half-way through an ordinary eight-bar phrase. Actually that eight-bar phrase avoids a formal cadence yet contrives to modulate to D minor while extending the sentence without a pause for another nine bars. The music glides along effortlessly, but it is full of rhythmic intricacies.

Here, then, is Tormentilla installed with Angelica in attendance to answer the bell to innumerable admirers who have been attracted by the fame of her beauty. But Hob, Gob, and Lob now appear in their usual compound time. Their purpose is to discover her

whereabouts and to lure the young prince to her and get him poisoned by her kiss. They propose to disguise themselves as journalists to gain admission—this is the first piece of spoken dialogue in the act up to this point. They are, however, compelled to disappear by Galanthus ringing the house-bell and Angelica opening the door to him. Galanthus is the bearer of a bouquet from his master. The dialogue of these two, in which the latest developments of the plot appear and their own love-affair is carried forward, is interrupted by a lively little duet between them, in which the time oscillates between 6/8 and 2/4 and the repartee comes pat without a quaver's breathing space.

A new turn is given to the situation by the appearance of the Mediums bearing a box of poisoned chocolates from the Empress, who has divined from her crystal-gazing that Tormentilla's beauty may endanger her son. (Tormentilla's own comment on this possibility when jealousy is ascribed by Angelica to Persicaria is 'Really, Angelica, the Oedipus complex doesn't amuse me, even in an Empress'.) This is the first appearance of what one may call the opposition—half-way through the second act. So they have a very distinctive trio specially coloured by the substitution of the cor anglais for the oboe; Ex. 9 gives its characteristic flavour:

Ex. 9.
Andante doloroso.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for Wood-wind, marked 'Wood-wind.' and 'col Cor Anglais.' It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts with a half rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The bottom staff is for the 3rd Medium, marked '3rd Medium.' It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts with a half note G4, a half note A4, a half note B4, and a half note C5. The two staves are connected by a brace on the right side.

3rd Medium. If you want to es-cape from the te-di-um,

Wood-wind.

1st & 2nd Mediums.
col 'Cello.

te - di - um.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for Wood-wind and the bottom staff is for 1st & 2nd Mediums, with a cello part indicated by 'col 'Cello.'. The music is in 2/4 time and features a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the staves, the lyrics 'te - di - um.' are written.

Their message and their gift delivered, the Mediums depart. They are not quite sure whether 'to go by the door or just evanesce'. Their place is taken by Hob, Gob, and Lob disguised respectively as a cricketer, a boxer, and a convict. The author's satire on the gutter press somehow misses fire; perhaps dog should not eat dog nor journalists guy their own calling. At the end of their trio the time is ripe for the appearance of Tormentilla, who is called on by a fanfare containing a false relation very typical of the composer's idiom—

Ex. 10.
Trpts. & Horns.

f

The image shows a single staff of musical notation for Trpts. & Horns. The music is in 2/4 time and features a fanfare with a false relation. The notation includes a forte dynamic marking 'f' and a crescendo hairpin.

and by the singing of the chorus off stage—the first piece of choral music in the act.

Tormentilla has two songs, both of them wistful in character like her song 'Oh, who would be unhappy me?' in Act 1. The second song 'There was a time' leads on into a duet that is a nocturne-cum-lullaby in the usual three verses, which may be compared with the Snake lullaby in the first act.

Ex. 11.

Flute, Strings & Harp.

The musical score for Ex. 11 is written for voice and instruments. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line with two parts: Tor. 1. and Ang. 2. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The instrumental accompaniment is in bass clef. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'Wear - y, wear - y, wear - i - ly Tar - ry, tar - ry, tar - ry - ing'. The instrumental accompaniment continues below the vocal line.

Tor. 1. Wear - i - ly I go to rest,
Ang. 2. Maids to slum - ber tarry - ing go,

Wear - y, wear - y, wear - i - ly
Tar - ry, tar - ry, tar - ry - ing

Tormentilla goes off to bed and Angelica puts out the lights. Ex. 6 is now heard again and is followed by Ex. 13 below (differently scored). Amaryllus enters guided by the mysterious voice engineered by Hob, Gob, and Lob. Voices that fill the enchanted air rouse Angelica, who comes out on to the gallery with a lantern in her hand and we have an ensemble between her, the Prince, and the Hobgoblins—the sort of thing that happens in the fourth act of *Figaro* in which people talk at cross purposes in the dark. The Hobgoblins are confident that the poisoned kiss is on the point of destroying Amaryllus. Not, however, before he has unburdened his heart of a heavenly serenade. This lovely melody begins to raise the temperature from comedy to pure romance, though actually it is in simple song form. But not in the simple ternary form that goes by that name in text-books, for Vaughan Williams's song melodies, although derived ultimately from English folk-song, do not follow simple

formulae but rather grow organically out of their first phrase. This particular song happens, however, to be unified by a recurring though varied phrase:



For the third verse there is a momentary change of key to a more intense E major in which the tune is played by the orchestra while the voice sings a counter-point to it. The song leads straight into a duet. At the moment when passion is rising to its climax Tormentilla remembers that she must on no account kiss her lover, not because she knows who he is—she still believes he is the simple goatherd he mendaciously declared himself to be at their first meeting—but because her integrity will not allow her to hurt any honest man. So the music breaks off, and when it is resumed it is the enchantment music that we hear:

Ex. 13.
Andante con moto.



ppp Violin solo
& Strings.

This, with voices singing in the background, is more than the lovers can resist, and they launch on a great love duet which reminds one of 'See the chariot at hand' in *Sir John in Love*.

Ex. 14.

Con fuoco.

Tutti. Long have I

wait - ed, Tor-men - til - la.

He kisses her and the Hobgoblins shout 'Tis done, the deed is done'. Tormentilla starts up with a scream as she realizes what it is that has been done. She flings herself on her knees beside Amaryllus, who gradually becomes unconscious, only rousing, as characters in operas always do, to sing as his farewell a snatch from his serenade. The curtain comes down on the senseless lovers with the Hobgoblins hovering round like birds of ill omen and only Angelica and Galanthus to lament 'Too late, too late, it is their fate'. And from far off comes the sound of voices behind the scenes pianissimo but insistent:

'The poison kiss has been their doom.'

Act III

The third act begins with a waltz, which is immediately followed by a vocal tango for the three Mediums. The Finale is in hornpipe rhythm, the sextet in which

the Hobgoblins and Mediums decide to commit the (by then) prevailing practice of matrimony is in tempo di valse, and the introductory orchestral waltz is repeated for a colloquy between the Empress and her Mediums. So that the last act, in which the plot has its tangles straightened out, becomes positively giddy with dance tunes. The waltz which is associated with the Empress Persicaria, to whose boudoir, studio, laboratory, or whatever the chamber is called in which magic is practised, the action of the play is now transferred, is simpler and rhythmically more straightforward than Angelica's waltz in the previous act (Ex. 8)—

Ex 15.

Andante alla Valse.

Strings, w.-wind & horns.
p Grazioso.
Col arpa.

Clarinets
 & Strings *pizz.* &c.

though it may be noted that the bar rhythms run not 4, 8, 16, 24 but 4, 6, 10, 21.

The Mediums are discovered at the domestic duties to which their mistress turns them on when they are not engaged in crystal-gazing or otherwise seeking

rapport with the unknowable. Their tango must be indicated:

Ex. 16.

Molto moderato.

Clar. Horn & Str.

f *p* Be - hold our

Trb. & Timp.
Str. & Harp.

add Flutes.

mys - - tic ex - er - cis - es, Ca - ba -

col Fl. Vla. *al 8va.*

- lis - tic, medium-is - tic:

col Trpt. & Trb.

After this they discuss the news in dialogue until the Empress sweeps on to the stage driving before her a little old physician, who tries to tell her that her son, in spite of the traces of every known poison on him, has completely resisted their effects but is suffering from cardiac affection, or in other words love sickness for Tormentilla. The Empress is distracted and looks to her crystal for help. But she does not like

what she sees in it, and her first song, in which she is echoed by the Mediums, shows her rampaging in chromatics and a brisk duple rhythm. What she has seen in her crystal is the figure of Dipsacus, 'the man I parted from twenty years ago'. A musical colloquy follows in which Dipsacus and his crew acclaim their day of vengeance while the Empress makes disparaging remarks. To her Mediums after the dark vision has vanished the Empress recounts her former association with Dipsacus and waxes so sentimental in doing so that she falls into a ballad on the subject 'When I was young'. This shows quite a different side of her character and prepares the way for the much more sentimental duet which she presently sings with Dipsacus (see Ex. 19 below). The scene is rounded off by the waltz (Ex. 15) in which the Empress dismisses her Mediums for the moment. They therefore 'evanesce', their favourite way of making an exit. The next scene consists of spoken dialogue in which the business of getting the Empress and Tormentilla together is managed by the intervention of Galanthus and Angelica, who is summoned by the Empress and comes up suddenly through the floor powdering her nose. Tormentilla is similarly summoned by the Empress and their wrangle is concluded with the honours to Tormentilla:

Empress. You are a very astute and objectionable young woman.

Tor. (cheerfully). Oh, no—only a young woman who is fighting for her love.

Emp. You love my son? You loved him when you thought him a goatherd?

Tor. To distraction.

Emp. (bopefully). Enough to give him up?

Tor. Enough to *refuse* to give him up.

Emp. But if it's for his happiness?

Tor. That is rank, old-fashioned sentiment, and you know it.

So the Empress surrenders in a splendid song, 'Love breaks all rules'—

Ex. 17.

Andante.



a tune at once imperial and romantic—not sentimental just now. She has not yet finished, however. She invokes the presence of Dipsacus in a vigorous aria supported by the hidden chorus of forest creatures; in itself it is not particularly interesting music but it fits the situation, and there is an optional chorus available for Dipsacus's Hobgoblins when it is desired to make the chorus a feature of the production. Dipsacus appears with the remark, 'You did that rather well, Persicaria, considering it's twenty years since I taught you that invocation'. Dipsacus and Persicaria now fence for victory over each other, but it begins to appear that the forces behind their rival magics are love and hate and the Empress has already learned that love is the stronger. However, Dipsacus has to be convinced that Amaryllus is not dead for all the poisonous power of the kiss, so the Empress conjures a vision of the lovers gazing into each other's eyes. When it is first heard their love music has still the distortion of magic in its augmented intervals—

Ex. 18.

Andante con moto.



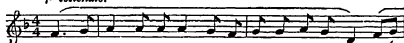
but presently it changes to honest triads honestly in G major, and then it tears at one's heart-strings. Is there no limit to the emotional power of the common chord? It hardly seems necessary to invent a twelve-note scale and a duodenary chord when anything so fresh and lovely can be extracted by triads moving serenely in parallel motion.

Dipsacus realizes that he is beaten. 'Cheer up,' says the Empress, 'we are both beaten—by Youth,' and she reveals that she had taken the precautionary measure of feeding her son on antidotes. Talk of the younger generation inclines their elders to sentimental reminiscence. So they indulge in an orgy of it in a duet. 'Sentimental' is usually in music a synonym for falsity or excess or other noxious quality. Will Vaughan Williams therefore give us a really bad sentimental tune? He does—and he does not. Here is a pedestrian melody:

Ex. 19.

Andante semplice.

p sostenuto.



Can you, can you re-mem-ber the days when first we met? The



games we play'd, The love we made, when first we met, when first we met.

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Its sentimental features, the reiterated A and the drop to the D, are exaggerated. But it is no ordinary vulgar tune: its phrase length is six bars not eight, its key is ambiguous, and the harmony does nothing to remove the impression that it begins in F major and ends in D minor. At one moment in the middle it turns into D major with the feeling that that is the tonic major, but on the other hand it ends decisively in F major. Note, too, how the component phrases are of different lengths and stresses, quite unlike the regular formations of the banal ballads which the tune is aping—rhythmic variations, these, quite beyond the capacity of the sentimental composer to achieve.

Another duet follows in which the betrothal of Angelica and Galanthus is brought about to a rather jaunty tune, then a quartet of the patter type in which the other two couples, parents and children, discuss love and housekeeping. Two, four, and now six, for the Hobgoblins and Mediums pair off in a sextet. They declare themselves tired of the magic business and propose to retire on their savings. 'From public life we evanesce.' This is the cue for the Finale, a horn-pipe à la Purcell in which all the principals and chorus chant their prothalamion:

Cakes are baking,
Frocks are making,
Cooks and modistes all are slaving.

So the opera ends with increasing animation and the asseveration that Love has conquered.

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